

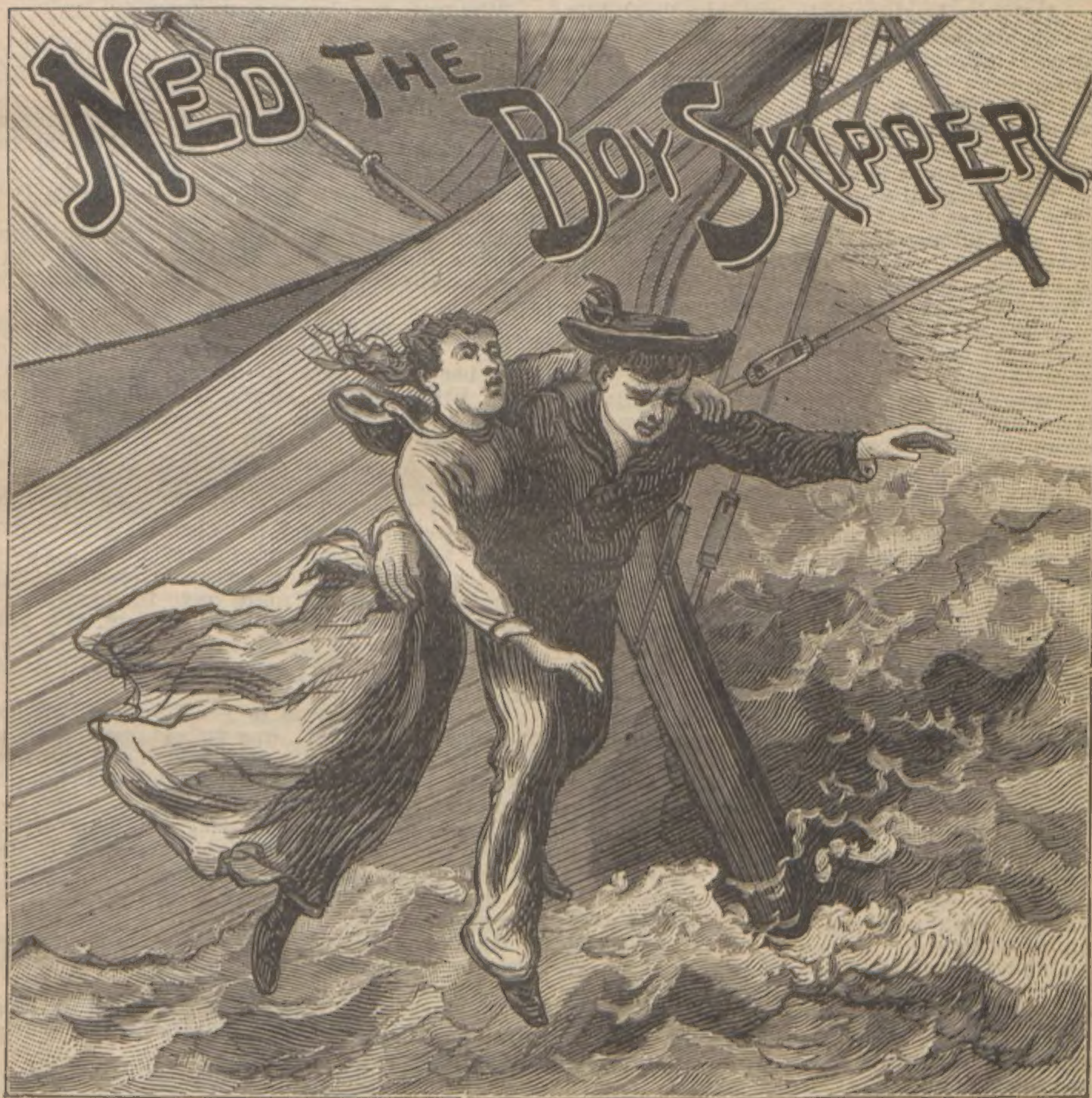
BEADLE'S POCKET Library

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AS THE LITTLE YACHT WAS ABOUT TO BE DASHED UPON THE BEACH, NED AND NORA LEAPED INTO THE SURF.

Ned, the Boy Skipper;

OR,

THE SEA SORCERESS'S CRUISE.

BY JACK FARRAGUT,

AUTHOR OF "NED, THE CABIN BOY," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE HAUNTED FORT.

"HA! ha! ha! He has hired me to light the beacons on this coast, that his son may arrive in safety by night, or in storm, and he expects me to serve him well.

"But he little dreams who I am, and that I have plotted to destroy that very son.

"And have I not cause to wish him dead, him and his lily-faced wife, who holds the place that my child should have had—my poor child, who sprung from this very cliff into the sea far below, and took her own life because that man had deceived her?

"Ha! ha! and I am expected to light beacons to bring him home in safety!

"Well, we shall see, we shall see!"

The speaker stood upon the very edge of a lofty cliff jutting out from a ridge of rocks, whose summit was clad with mountain pines, far out into the sea.

The scene was wild and picturesque in the extreme, for the coast was one to be dreaded by the careful mariner, even when no fierce winds swept the sea.

It was upon the main shores, whose inlets, rivers and islands have sent forth the best sailors that ever trod a deck, trained as they have been from infancy amid scenes of danger, and where cool heads, brave hearts, and strong arms can alone guide a prow in safety through innumerable perils.

A chain of islands, a mile off-shore, served to break somewhat the fury of the ocean in its wrath, but here and there, seemingly everywhere, were reefs that had proven the destruction of many a gallant craft.

Through a narrow channelway, between the reefs further out, then onward through two islands, a vessel had to pass to reach the harborage inside, when it was comparatively safe sailing down to the river mouth, a league further along the coast, where the aspect of the country put on a more hospitable and inviting look, for here and there were visible substantial farm-houses and barns, where abode men of means.

With a beacon light on a certain point, a good pilot could get his bearings the darkest and stormiest night and run through the reef without, while a second beacon upon another situation would guide him through the channel passing between the islands, after which it was open sailing to the river entrance.

All along the coast there was not a wilder spot than where the speaker stood, whose words open this story.

It was a natural fortification, and years before, when, the "oldest inhabitant" could not recall, it had been a sea fortress, and the guns,

on their rotten carriages, still remained to add to the picture of desolation about it.

A natural embankment in front, with embrasures and ports in the rock, were upon the seaside, while back of them were towering rocks that looked like turrets, caverns and innumerable nooks and corners such as an old castle might have.

The entrance to this vast ruin, which nature and man's art had done so much to make impregnable seemingly, was through a tunnel-like cave that was dark and forbidding.

Strange stories were told of this old ruin, and the country folk and coast fishermen shunned it as they would a graveyard by night, for early in the present century, kind reader, superstition held sway in our land.

The garrison, it was said, had all been found murdered one morning by an officer bearing dispatches there.

Who were the slayers none knew.

Some said Indians had done the deed.

Others asserted that a mutiny had occurred, and the garrison had fought among themselves to the death.

Again it was rumored, and perhaps with more truth, that a pirate chief had hidden the treasure there long before it was a fort, and had come to claim his ill-gotten wealth, and had massacred the entire garrison.

After this terrible fate, and with the slain soldiers buried within the fort, it was no wonder that the simple country folks shunned the spot.

And more so was it dreaded of late, as it was said to be the favorite resort of a witch, who had her home back in the pines, a pleasant, cozy little cottage, strangely unlike what the abode of a sorceress was expected to be, and where she had lived for years with her two children, a girl and a boy, both of whom are destined to figure in this romance.

Within this fort stood the old man, who had been hired to attend the beacons, and which lights were to be simple fires of fat-pine knots built at certain points, when a vessel coming along the coast by night gave the proper signals to show that she wished to run in, and was not a foe, for at the time of which I write the "war of 1812" had just begun between England and the United States.

The one who stood in the Haunted Fort, as the place was called, was an old man with a darkly-bronzed face, a gray beard, and the few locks of hair visible beneath his broad-brimmed tarpaulin were snow-white.

He was dressed in a pea-jacket of blue cloth, white duck pants, and wore them stuck in the tops of boots, that looked as though they might at some time in the past have belonged to a buccaneer chief.

He had a belt about his waist, in which was stuck a clasp-knife and double-barreled revolver.

His eyes were black and piercing, his face stern, and he appeared like one who had known better days.

Whatever others might think of the Haunted Fort, and shun it, he certainly felt no dread of it, although night was coming on, and a tempest was raging out upon the sea, hurling huge

waves against the rocky base of the cliff, while the pines sighed requiems, as the winds swept through them, to the dead lying in the old ruin.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASTER OF RIVERVIEW.

RIVERVIEW MANSION was one of the grandest houses in the State of Maine at the time of which I write.

The house was large, rambling and comfortable from cellar to attic, while its grounds, sloping to the river-bank, had been laid out with walks and flower-beds that added to the beauty of the scene.

A thousand acres of well-tilled land stretched away inland about the mansion, and above on the river was a little hamlet of cozy homes, where dwelt the tillers of the soil.

The pastures were dotted with sheep and cattle, the stables were well-filled, and upon all was an air of thrift which told that it was the home of a rich man.

Within all was comfort, yes, and luxury, and the master of Riverview Mansion certainly should have been a happy man, if being surrounded with this world's goods in abundance would make him so.

The mansion stood half a mile up the river and a league from the Haunted Fort, and from its broad piazzas glimpses of the ocean could be had.

Jutting out from the river-bank in front of the homestead was a stout wooden pier, and anchored about it were several pleasure crafts, with row boats lying upon the shore.

Within the mansion, upon the very afternoon upon which the beacon-tender at the Haunted Fort is presented to the reader, sat the master of Riverview.

He was a man of striking appearance, had lived half a century, and had the respect of the neighborhood.

In his early years he had been poor, and a lawyer, he had risen to a judgeship; but wealth coming to him, he had given up his profession and settled down to the enjoyment of his later years.

A son only had he to cling to in the world, and he was a gallant officer in the navy of his country; but having lost his vessel some time before by capture, he was awaiting the building of a new one, which his father, the judge, had presented him with.

Alone in his elegant home, Judge Elmore was awaiting the return of his son with his young bride, who were to pass the bleak winter months at Riverview.

Yet, as Judge Elmore sat alone in his library that afternoon, with the shadows of coming night creeping about him, he did not appear to be happy.

With an impatient imprecation he arose from his easy-chair and approached the window which looked seaward, while he said in a low tone:

"The storm is a wild one, and Heaven grant that no harm befalls my boy and his beautiful bride in running in.

"I did hope that the ship would arrive during the day; but darkness is coming on now, and, as

she certainly must come to-night, she will have to run in with the beacons as her guide.

"But then my son knows these waters well enough to come in with the aid of the lights.

"I do hope that old sailor will make no mistake and do his work well.

"I suppose I should have sent Caleb to aid him; But then Caleb would never go near that Haunted Fort by night, I am sure, and it is well the old seaman did not know about the stories told of the weird old ruin, or he would have failed me, too.

"Somehow I feel strangely blue to-night, and I cannot drive a presentiment of evil out of my heart.

"I do hope that I am not to be punished at this late day for my crimes toward my brother and his family.

"Bah! I am silly to think of the past, for if I did hire an assassin to end his days and keep from his wife and children the wealth he intrusted to me for them, and am I not repaid for those sins by the riches I now possess and the luxuries I have about me?

"But one other knows of the crime and he is my ally in guilt and has enriched himself as I did, so that he will not betray me.

"As for my boy, he never suspects that this home and my wealth was stolen and that it cost human lives.

"Whatever became of the wife of my half-brother I cannot tell.

"They fled from my persecution, though they did not suspect me, and it is better so, or I should have had their lives upon my hand.

"Somehow I have a dread of that old Elsie, the Witch of the Haunted Fort, as though I expected to find in her and her brats the wife and children of Norcross.

"But I am foolish, for his wife would not now be forty, and that old hag is over sixty, if she is a day, for her hair is as white as snow.

"I should not fear for them either, for the woman sold her home, and certainly had a support so that they were not left beggars.

"No, no; I must cast the haunting spirits down, and enjoy that which I possess— Oh! Caleb, I am glad you have brought the lamps, for this is a dreary night out," and the judge turned away from the window with a shudder, as his butler entered with lights.

"Yes, sir, it's an awful night, and I do hope the ship with the lieutenant and his young wife won't come to-night," answered Caleb.

"I hope so myself, Caleb; but then, with the beacons lighted, I do not think they will find any great difficulty in running in, unless the night is intensely dark and the tempest increases."

"Well, sir, it is going to be terribly dark and the storm has been getting worse since sunset."

"Heaven protect my boy then in the perils he will have to face; but, Caleb, would you mind spending the night on the coast with the old seaman, to see that the beacons are properly lighted?"

Caleb started and turned quickly toward the judge, while he said in solemn tones:

"Your Honor, I have never disobeyed you in one thing, sir, have I?"

"You never have, Caleb, for you have ever been most faithful."

"Well, your Honor, you'll forgive me if I do so now, for I would not be near that old fort to-night for a pirate's gold."

"Very well, Caleb, I will not ask it, and I guess the old beacon-tender will do his duty."

"I guess so, sir, and I hope so," and Caleb was about to depart, when the deep boom of a gun at sea rattled the windows in the mansion.

"Ha! there is the signal-gun, and now the beacons will be lit."

"May Heaven help that vessel now, and save those on board," cried the judge, and he began to pace to and fro with nervous step: while the storm increased in fury, as though it had taken the signal-gun as a defiance from the vessel to do its worst.

CHAPTER III.

THE FALSE BEACONS.

HAD Judge Elmore known who the old man was that had come to him with the story that he had sailed with his son, and whom he had engaged as beacon-tender opposite the channel, he would have been in utter dismay that night of storm, instead of dread that all might not go well.

He had taken the old man to the cliff, near the Haunted Fort, and to the entrance to a ravine, where the two beacon-fires were to be lit.

He had told him the signals that the vessel must give before he should light them, and then had taken him to a fisherman's cot that overhung the waters, and which was to be his home.

Stores in plenty had been sent to the cot from the mansion, and pine-knots had been placed upon the spots selected for the beacons, with nothing to do but to light them.

Several days had the old man been on duty, fishing and sleeping by day to pass away time, and watching a greater portion of the night.

Still the looked-for ship had not hove in sight.

Then the storms which sweep along that coast in the autumn set in, and the lone watcher in the cot kept constantly on the alert.

At last he spied a vessel late one afternoon, and he knew she must be the long looked-for craft, for she was certainly not a war-ship, as his practiced eye at once told him.

Nearer and nearer the vessel came, and as she was now headed for the point where the channel was, there could be no doubt but that it was the expected bearer of Lieutenant Elmore and his wife.

With her coming the storm began to increase in fury, as though to make her passage through the dangerous channel more difficult, and the old man smiled quietly as he noticed it.

"Blow, you good winds, toss, you reckless sea waves, for you have work to do this night."

"It is too tiresome waiting for my revenge through long years, so you strike together, and the man who killed my child, and the woman who lured him from her, will go down together in your depths."

"Innocent ones must suffer for the guilty, but that has been the way of the world from its

beginning, and I will bear their lives on my conscience to punish Elmore and his bride."

The shadows now began to deepen, while the winds howled more furiously through the pines, and the roar of the surf became almost deafening.

Watching the ship attentively the beacon-tender saw now that there was no doubt as to her being the looked-for ship, as she was heading directly for the channel entrance.

Turning upon her a glass which he carried hung over one shoulder, he muttered:

"It cannot be other than the craft."

"Ha! ha! now my work will soon be done, and you, my poor Nora, will be avenged."

Night had now fallen, but off upon the sea the lights of the vessel could be seen.

Then a burst of flame came from her bows, and soon after there followed the deep boom of a gun, the same that told Judge Elmore that his son was off-shore and about to venture in through the dangerous channel.

Instantly the beacon-tender whirled a lantern three times around his head, forming a circle of fire.

It was a signal, and on board the vessel came an answer with a *red lantern*.

"Bravo! it is the signal. Now for the next test," and the lantern was whirled twice about his head.

Again came an answer, this time with a green lantern, and three times it made a circle in the air from the ship's deck.

"Ha! ha! ha! the signals are correct, and now to light the beacons," cried the old man.

Instantly he darted along the ridge until he came to a rocky point, and here he paused.

In a sheltered nook was a pile of fat-pine knots, and to these he quickly touched the flame of his lantern.

Instantly there flared up a bright blaze in the intense blackness of night, and a lucid pathway was cast off over the dark waters, to be greeted by a cheer from the ship's crew, and their voices were borne upon the wind to the ears of the old man as he hastened on to another point.

Here was another pile of pine fagots in a sheltered corner of rocks, and these were kindled, as had been the others.

With this second pathway of light flaming across the waters another cheer was heard from the crew of the ship.

"Ay, cheer on, my gallant fellows, but you go to your doom, little believing that these two fires you deem beacons of safety are lurid lights to destroy."

"Come on, brave ship, to your fate, and God have mercy upon all who perish, excepting those two, for whom I make many suffer."

"See! my fires burn up grandly, and Elmore believes that they mark the course through the reefs and islands which he is to steer; but little does he dream that they lead him *directly upon* Graveyard Reef and Wreckers' Island."

"If chance should cause him to miss the one, the other he can never avoid."

"Ha! ha! now I will stand here by this pile of fagots, which Judge Elmore told me to light, and await the end."

So saying the old man took his stand by the pile of fagots on the cliff near the Haunted

Fort, and which if he had lighted instead of the false beacon, would have guided the vessel safely through her dangers, if under the guidance of skillful hands.

Out over the black waters flamed the two false fires, and trusting in them the noble craft came flying on, while every heart on board beat high with hope.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE SCENE IN THE HAUNTED FORT.

"THERE she comes hastening to her doom. God forgive me for making the innocent suffer; but perish who may, I must destroy Elmore and his bride.

"Ha! ha! see how bravely her pilot rushes on, trusting in this bright firelight!

"No! by heavens! she changes her course! ay! just as the breakers foamed beneath her bow.

"But she is too far in to extricate herself now; but it was a quick eye that detected those reefs ahead, and a bold, strong hand that put her about.

"Ha! she luffs up from the Wreck Reef! ay, and rounds Lizard Point—now if she changes her course dead before the gale, I will know that she has a pilot on board whom my false beacons cannot deceive even in the blackness and storm of this night.

"Heaven have mercy! she has a pilot at her helm, for now she heads for the cliff through the channel in the reefs.

"Now she passes safely through, and heads for the island channel, the man at her helm disregarding utterly my lights and steering as he should for safety.

"He passes the islands, ay, and puts his helm hard down to run for the river haven.

"He has saved the vessel, and cheated me of my revenge.

"In God's name who can he be?

"There is but one living being that I know of upon this coast who could do what yonder pilot has done, and he—no! no! no! it cannot be that he is on board that vessel.

"Great God! should he be, and my act have sent him to his death!"

As though appalled at the thought the old man covered his face with his hands, and thus stood for an instant.

Then he said quickly:

"I must be off, for when they tell the story of the false beacons I will be hunted down."

Away he darted through the darkness, and yet made no false step as he hurried along the ridge in the direction of the Haunted Fort.

Reaching the cavern entrance to the old ruin he entered it without hesitation, and soon after a light gleamed in one of the cave chambers in the rear of the fortress.

The roar of the waves and the howling of the winds still were heard, within, but unheeding them, the old man seated himself at a rude table and buried his head in his hands.

The cavern-chamber was large, and the walls were evenly hewn.

In one corner stood a rustic cot with neat bed-clothing upon it, and an open chest near by

contained wearing apparel that had a feminine look.

A table, a chair, bench, a few cooking utensils upon a hearth, for a chimney was built up there to the roof, and a shelf upon which were dishes and provisions completed the furnishing of the dismal retreat, for dismal it was in spite of the ruddy glow of the lamp.

For a long time the old seaman rested with his face in his hands; so long in fact, that one would have deemed him asleep.

But suddenly he started, for a slight sound was heard in the court of the fortress, which the wind and waves had not made.

Again it was heard, and the old seaman sprang to his feet, his eyes bent in seeming horror upon the exit from the cavern, which led out into an arched tunnelway opening upon the interior court of the fortress.

Before this tunnel were the graves of the murdered garrison, and to gain the inner cavern, one had to pass in among the little mounds that marked the last resting-place of those who had so mysteriously lost their lives.

"It is a human step," said the seaman, in a hushed tone, and he gazed toward the cavern exit.

Along the tunnelway came the sound, and then into the rock chamber stepped a slender form.

It was a boy, or rather youth, of perhaps fifteen, with a well-knit figure, broad shoulders, upright form, and a face that was frank, fearless, and full of intelligence and conscious power.

It was a handsome, striking face, seldom seen in one of his years.

He was dressed in duck pants, a jacket of blue cloth, and a tarpaulin shaded his dark curls.

"Ah! who have we here?" cried the youth, placing his hand upon a knife in his belt, and stepping toward the old seaman, who stretched forth his arms and said in thrilling tones:

"Oh, Ned! my son! my son!"

"Mother! Mother! can this be you—and in that dress—the dress of a man!" cried the youth, in amazement.

Instantly the tarpaulin was taken from her head, and a mass of white hair fell over the shoulders, while a false beard was jerked off the face, and a woman stood revealed.

A woman with a dark, stern face, piercing black eyes, and the look of one who had become old before her time.

Traces of beauty yet rested upon every feature—but the beauty of the past had been marred by the traces of sorrow and trouble which later years had left there.

Her form was graceful and slender, and she seemed to shrink from being seen by her son in man's garb.

"Yes, Ned, my noble boy, I am your mother, though you see me in a disguise I meant not that you should know that I had put on," and she stepped once more toward him, as though to embrace him, but he said, with strange sternness for one so young:

"Mother, I landed but a short while ago from a noble vessel, and learned that Judge Elmore had engaged an old seaman to attend to lighting the beacon fires upon the coast.

"That man lighted *false beacons*, to lure her to ruin and death, and men came here to find the one who had betrayed his trust.

"The beacon-tender they could not find, for he had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

"Now I came on here, where I knew I would find you, as you dared not live in your cottage, and I find you in the disguise of an old seaman, with white hair, a gray beard and sailor suit, just as the false beacon-lighter was described to be.

"Oh, mother! what does this mean?"

He stood before her, drawn up to his full height, his face stern, yet sad, and gazing upon her with a look from which she seemed to shrink.

Twice she attempted to speak before she found utterance for the words:

"Ned, my son, I am the guilty one.

"I lighted the false beacons."

CHAPTER V.

SAILOR BOY NED.

"MOTHER! you lighted those false beacons?" said the youth in a low, earnest tone.

"I did, Ned," was the firm reply.

"To lure that noble vessel to destruction?"

"Yes."

"To cause her crew and passengers to perish, mother?"

"Yes."

"Oh, mother! what can have tempted you to commit such a crime?"

"*Revenge!*"

She fairly hissed the word.

"Revenge? Ah! I remember. Lieutenant Elmore was on board."

"Yes, and his wife."

"And you sought their lives?"

"I did, for he murdered your sister Nora."

"But what had his young and innocent bride done?"

"She lured him from Nora."

"No, mother, for the lieutenant was engaged when he met Nora.

"My sister saved his vessel from destruction, by piloting it into the river haven, and Lieutenant Elmore became her acknowledged lover.

"He gave her up and married another, and poor Nora took her own life by springing from this old ruin into the sea.

"For her life I hold him as guilty, and one day I shall keep my oath, mother, and hold him to account for his crime.

"But, oh, mother! to think that you plotted to destroy him at the cost of so many lives! Yes, you would have even sacrificed the life of your son and one other who has returned with him."

"I did not know that you were on board the vessel, my son," and the woman seemed utterly crushed.

"Yes, mother, I took passage on her with one other, my friend, to come to you and tell you glad tidings."

"And you ran that vessel in, Ned?" said the woman quickly.

"Yes, mother."

"You discovered that the beacons were not where they should be?"

"Yes."

"I should have known that it was you at the helm, and the thought did flash through my brain, but then I believed you in Boston.

"Oh, God! what if I had sent you to death by my act, Ned?"

"Mother, it would have been no worse than to have sent those other innocent ones to destruction, simply to punish one who was guilty."

"Oh, Ned, my boy, do not upbraid me for now I see the full enormity of my crime.

"But, boy," and she spoke fiercely and quickly:

"I saw the beautiful face of poor Nora upon the crest of every wave that rolled ashore.

"I heard her cries mingling with the howling winds.

"In the sighing of the pines I listened to her sighs.

"I saw her stand in spirit upon the cliff from whence she sprung, every night, until I was mad.

"And, as they had accused you of wrong, of desertion from the navy, and driven you from me, and had hunted me down as a witch until I was forced to live in this den, I became mad in my thirst for revenge, and forgetting all else, sought to destroy that man.

"Forgive me, Ned, my son, for now I realize all."

He sprung toward her and clasped her in his arms, and for a moment no word was uttered.

Then the boy said softly: "Mother, I wish to ask of you a question, and you must answer me frankly."

"Yes, Ned."

"You have said that my father was lost at sea?"

"He was."

"Did you ever suspect that he was murdered?"

"Murdered? In God's name what do you mean?"

"Did you never suspect that some enemy might have wrecked his vessel?"

"Ned, I have had strange thoughts like these, for, when your father sailed on his last voyage, some unknown person began to persecute me and mine.

"First, your sister was stolen, and it was weeks before I found her.

"Then you were thrown into the sea, from a pier in the little seaport where we lived, and a fisherman in his boat saved you, and said that he saw a man hurl you into the water.

"After this, persecution after persecution was visited upon me, and I wrote to your father's half-brother, telling him all.

"But he did not reply, and selling my little home, I bought the shallop, and a sailor from my girlhood, I set sailed from the hated spot by night, and went to seek another home.

"To escape a storm I ran in here, guided by a fisherman, and finding the little cottage over the hill was for sale, I purchased it, and there we have lived in peace, until the serpent whom I to-night tried to destroy, trailed across our door."

"But, mother, did you never feel that my father might not be dead?"

"Yes, Ned, I have had that feeling too; but alas! it is too much joy to hope, for joy has not come to me since he set sail long years ago.

"See, my hair is white, for losing him, and the dread that you and Nora were to be taken from me made me almost mad, and at times I believe I am mad."

"Mother, then the madness must go from you, for my father was not lost as you believed."

"Oh, God! is this Thy punishment for the crime I would have this night committed?"

"Is this Thy showering joy upon me, when the thunderbolts of Thy anger should strike me?" and the poor woman dropped upon her knees and raised her hands toward heaven.

Then, out of the shadow of the tunnel-like way came a tall form, and he clasped her hands and raised her up, while he said softly:

"Elsie, my dearly loved wife, I am here."

She sprung into his arms with a cry of joy, for in the dark-faced, gray-haired man, with a look so brave and so strong, older by years than when last she saw him, she recognized the husband she had so long mourned as dead.

For a long time no word was spoken between the three, and then the returned sailor said:

"Elsie, after long years I have come back to you, and I find changes have come to those I loved."

"From our noble Sailor Boy Ned, I have heard of all your sufferings."

"Accidentally I met him, and from that day we were friends, although neither of us then knew who the other was."

"That you have suffered deeply I know, and I, too, forgive your mad attempt of to-night, as our son does, for I know what it is to be revengeful."

"I, too, am on the track of revenge, for my half-brother, Judge Elmore, whom I trusted with all my wealth, which had come into my possession, and bade him give it over to you should harm befall me, has betrayed the trust."

"He was to be heir to all, should any strange circumstance take you and our children off by death."

"The wealth I possessed, and which I got through the finding of a mine in a foreign land, I did not tell you of, for I waited to be able to give you all at once a vast fortune upon my return home."

"But, as I said, I trusted all to my half-brother and one other, a Mr. Curtis—"

"Of Boston?" asked the woman.

"Yes."

"A friend of Judge Elmore?"

"Yes."

"He had one daughter, an only child?"

"He had."

"It is she whom Lieutenant Elmore made his bride?"

"It is, for they leagued together to murder me and share my fortune."

"They sent a hireling upon my vessel to kill me, and he wrecked the vessel; but he was severely hurt, and I aided him to the shore."

"There we two lived upon a desolate island all these years, and I learned from his lips the story of what he had been bribed to do."

"At last we were rescued by a passing vessel, and returning, I could not find you; but I traced those two men in all their villainy, and believed that they had killed you and my children, too."

"At last I met, on my way to face Judge Elmore, our noble sailor boy, and you know the rest."

"He came to Boston to meet me, and we sailed for this place, for I have come to claim my own from the hands of the man who stole it from me."

"Now come, this den of rocks is no place for you."

"Come to your pleasant little cottage, and to-morrow I will force that man from the home he has so long lived in, and which, bought with my money, is mine."

With joy in their hearts at being again united, the three left the Haunted Fort and wended their way to the cottage which the country folks had avoided as the home of Elsie the Witch.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FISHERMAN'S STORY.

IN his anxiety to discover the seaman, as he supposed it to be, who had lighted the false beacons, Judge Elmore was disturbed by a visitor on the day after the arrival of the ship in the river haven, who at once made known who he was and the nature of his business.

To his horror, Judge Elmore found not only that his half-brother, Norcross Evans, whom he believed dead, to be alive, but that every dollar of the vast fortune he had stolen was to be taken from him.

"The son, too, learned of his father's crime, and was glad to give up the fortune rather than have the disgrace become public by that father's having to go to prison."

And more, Lieutenant Elmore having married the daughter of the man who had been the ally of the judge in his crime, saw the riches of his young bride swept from him, too, and knew that he had only his pay with which to support them, when before he had been envied by his brother-officers for his wealth.

Out of Riverview Mansion then went the Elmore, and rumors were at once set afloat by the cunning judge that the husband of Elsie, the Witch had returned from a foreign land, where he had accumulated vast riches, and offering him a fabulous sum for his estate, he had sold it.

Captain Norcross Evans smiled grimly when he heard the rumor his step-brother had started and let the story go for what it was worth and with his wife and son settled himself comfortably in his new home, with but one sad memory to darken the joy of the household.

That memory was that poor Nora had been driven to suicide by the act of the man whom she had so madly loved.

The second evening after the arrival of the captain and his family in Riverview Mansion, a fisherman from down the coast came up the river and landed his light skiff at the pier, upon which stood Ned, the Sailor Boy.

"Does the widow Norcross live here, lad?" he asked.

"The one who was supposed to be the widow Norcross lives here; but she is now Mrs. Norcross Evans, her husband having returned and not being dead, as was believed," answered Ned, glad to tell the story of his father's return.

"I mean the one they called Elsie, The

Witch of the Haunted Fort?" said the fisherman.

"Yes, my mother; she lives here."

"I went to her cottage and a man told me I would find her here at this great house."

"She is there, and if you wish to see her I will let her know you are here."

"Are you her son?"

"I am."

"Then I guess I'd better tell you the news first, so you can break it gently to your mother."

"What news have you to tell?"

"News you'll like to hear; but as they say joy kills sometimes same as grief does, you'd better let it be known quietly so as not to shock your mother."

"But what have you to tell?"

"You have a sister Nora, who—"

"I had a sister Nora, but she is dead," sadly said Ned.

"There you are just out, young man."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say, and I say that your sister Nora is not dead."

Ned turned deadly pale and gazed at the man with a look that seemed to read his heart.

Then he said hoarsely:

"My man, you do not mean to trifle with me in telling me this?"

"I am not one to trifle about a matter so serious, and I'll tell you the story."

"I was fishing some time ago close in under the cliff on which stands the old ruin."

"I had a shipmate over on the island off which our little smack was anchored, and I had ventured near the Haunted Fort to throw in my line, while he wouldn't come so near."

"While watching a fine vessel stand out to sea from the river haven, I suddenly heard a fluttering sound over my head same as angels might make flying through the air, and I can tell you I was frightened—that frightened I dared not look up—for I had heard so many stories of the old Witch and the Haunted Fort."

"But just as I was seizing my oars to row away, there came down into the water, with a tremendous splash, a human form."

"It sunk down deep into the waters and then rose to the surface, and I dragged it into the boat, for I saw it was a young girl, and a pretty one, too, and I thought she was dead, she was that pale and still."

"I rowed quickly over to the island, told my shipmate, and we put her on the shallop to bring her up the river to the village, where we thought a doctor might bring her to."

"But the wind was light, and the tide carried us down the coast against all we could do to prevent, and so we continued on to our own island, where we lived."

"I gave her in charge of my wife, and the women on the island congregated together and fetched her to, while I and my shipmates set out for Portland with a smack-load of fish, intending to take the poor girl home when we returned, for, though she had come out of her swoon, she seemed ill."

"But we were captured by a Britisher, and it was some time before we managed to get away from 'em, and could get back to our island."

"There we found the young girl just recovering from a long attack of brain fever, but she was all right once more, though terrible white and thin."

"My wife had nursed her through all, and the poor girl seemed almost sorry to be alive."

"But we cheered her up, and she told me where she lived, and I came off in my skiff to tell you, for the Britishers have not left us a shallop or a smack on the island, out of twenty we had before the war began, and some sixty good lads are left with nothing to do and mouths to feed, so they wanted me to look for a berth on a privateer for them while I was up here."

"My man, the news you bring us is joyous indeed, for we all believed my poor sister dead."

"I will at once go and break the news to my mother and father, and then you must come up to the mansion and tell them your story as you told it to me, while as to your getting berths on a privateer you need not look further, for I know of one that will sail in a couple of months or so, and will need a lot of good men for a crew."

With this Ned hastened off to the mansion to tell the good tidings which he had heard from the lips of the fisherman.

CHAPTER VII.

LOST NORA.

THE story of the fisherman was told by Ned to his parent, and their hearts were filled with joy, while the boy sailor was made doubly glad by being allowed to go after his sister in the pretty little pleasure sloop which Lieutenant Elmore had had built for himself.

The fisherman was to go along as crew, and he promised to return with the yacht, along with a shipmate or two, and they could have a talk with Captain Evans and then go back to their island-home to await orders from him as to when he would need them for the new vessel.

So anxious was Ned to get off on his cruise to bring back Nora, that he could not be persuaded to wait until morning, but started with Leander, the Fisherman, as soon as the little sloop was stored with the necessary provisions.

The night was clear, and a good breeze was blowing, and Ned ran out to sea by the upper channel through the islands, which was equally as dangerous as the one in front of the Haunted Fort; but the boy knew every fathom of water near his home, as in his sail-boat he and his sister had passed hours cruising about, fishing and enjoying themselves, and thus learned while mere children, lessons that served them well in after years.

"You are a cool hand at the tiller, sir," said the fisherman to Ned, addressing him with a respect which the boy commanded in spite of his youth.

"Experience has taught me to be cool," was the modest answer; and to the admiration of Leander the youth ran his vessel through the dangerous gantlet of reefs and islands.

"This craft is a goer, Leander," said Ned, greatly pleased with the behavior of his little vessel.

"Yes, sir; she sails like a witch," and then, as though feeling that he had made an unfortunate comparison, he hastened to add:

"What is her name, sir?"

"The Sea Sorceress is the name that Lieutenant Elmore gave her, and I do not care to change it."

"It is a good name, sir—but there is a breaker just ahead," and Leander pointed to where the water was foaming violently, as though washing upon a sunken reef.

"Let me show you something about what you call a breaker," said Ned, and he held on, as before, straight for the foaming waters, which covered a space of fifty feet wide, while upon either side the sea was comparatively calm.

"Don't you see the breaker, sir? It dashes upon a sunken reef," said Leander, as the bowsprit of the sloop was almost over the caldron of the waters.

"Yes, I see it," and the next instant the yacht was rocking in the rough waves, while, to the astonishment and joy of the fishermen, she did not strike, as he expected, hard upon a sunken rock.

"See, Leander, this rough water happens to be the channel, for on each side, not the length of this craft away, are sunken reefs.

"This is what I wish to show you, for there is no bottom here, that I ever could find with a fifty-fathom line, while there is not five feet of water yonder over the reefs.

"My sister Nora and myself found this out three years ago; but what makes the water so wild here I cannot understand."

Once out at sea, the sloop went bounding along on her way; but as the wind was ahead and she had to tack, it was dawn before they came in sight of the fisherman's island.

At last, shortly after sunset, the sloop ran into a little cove, Leander now being at the helm, and as Ned sprung on shore he was met by Nora, who, with a glad cry, rushed into his arms.

"Nora, my sister!"

"Ned, my noble brother!"

It was all that they said for some moments, for their hearts were full.

She had seen the sloop coming, and recognized it, while bitter memories swept over her, as the same little vessel had been the one in which Lieutenant Elmore had made many a visit to the cove near the Haunted Fort, where she was wont to meet him.

With a glass handed her by the good wife of the fisherman, she had recognized her brother, and she wondered how it was that he came in the Elmore yacht.

"Oh, Ned, I am so glad to meet you again," said Nora, after a few moments of silence. Ned gazed upon her with joy, and answered:

"And we are so happy to know that you are not dead, Nora, after your fearful fall from the cliff."

She colored quickly, but remained silent, for his words led her to believe, as he had intended they should, that it was believed that she had fallen from the cliff, instead of having deliberately attempted to take her own life.

"Oh! it was terrible, Ned, and I have suffered so all this long time since, though all here have been most kind to me."

"Well, Nora, your sufferings are ended now, for you return home with me," and Ned gazed

into the lovely though pale face of his sister, and thought how soon the roses would come back to her cheeks.

"Oh, I almost dread to go back to that cottage," said Nora, remembering how happy she had been there, and how the one who had made her life joyous had cruelly deserted her.

"We won't go back to the cottage, Nora, but to a grand house, for we are rich now," and Ned spoke with an air of excusable pride.

"Rich, Ned!" asked Nora, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"Yes, and I'll tell you all about it as we sail homeward; but now let us go and see the kind people who have taken such good care of you, and I have a purse of gold here for them, and a bundle of clothing mother sent you."

The fisherman had hastened up to his cot and quickly told the news of his visit, and the hope that himself and shipmates would get a berth on a privateer.

Then his wife set about preparing as good a breakfast as her larder could afford, and a pleasant party sat down to the meal, while Ned handed over the purse of gold to the good woman, and some stores which his mother had sent by him.

Early in the forenoon the yacht started on her return, four of the fishermen besides Leander accompanying her.

Nora had dressed herself in some of the clothing brought by her brother, and already looked better, the prospect of soon being with those who loved her cheering her greatly.

On the way back Ned told the story of his father's return, and Nora wept with joy, for most devoted had she been to him, and bitterly had she mourned his loss.

"Oh, Ned! we will be so happy, now," she said in a low, earnest tone.

But, as she uttered the words, out from behind a pine-clad island glided a vessel-of-war, and a shot was sent flying over the deck of the little yacht as a signal for her to lay to.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WRECK.

"It's a Britisher, as I live!" cried Leander, as his face paled, when he beheld the strange vessel.

"Yes, her rig is English, though she flies the American flag," answered Ned, calmly, as he headed his sloop in toward a group of islands.

Just then came another shot from the war-vessel, which passed uncomfortably near over the heads of those on the yacht.

"She's in earnest for us to lay to," said Ned.

"Yes, sir, and you don't look as though you intended to take her hints," responded a frank-faced fisherman who was one of the crew.

"Not unless I am compelled to, will I," and Ned glanced at his sister with a look that plainly said to the fishermen that his sister was the one that kept him from running the hottest fire that the vessel could pour upon him.

It was a large sloop-of-war, carrying a heavy armament and a full crew, and in spite of her flying the American flag, Ned was sure that she was a British vessel.

Nora had also understood the look of her

brother, that it referred to her, and she said pluckily:

"Now, Ned, you know well what captivity to a British vessel means, from all we have heard from those who have been prisoners, so I would say hold on under all circumstances."

"You are a brave girl, Nora; but he may knock us out of the water."

"Then we can swim ashore to the island," answered the girl.

"Yes, and then we would have a mile and a half to swim to the mainland."

"I can make it, with a little help if I get tired, for I am not so weak as I look, having bathed in the surf daily of late."

"Don't mind me, Ned, but run for it."

"Ah, I have an idea! Here, Leander, take the tiller while I get an English flag that is in the cabin."

Ned ran down into the cabin, and soon returned with a British flag, which he ran up to the peak, just as a third shot came from the vessel, which was now in full chase.

As soon as the colors fluttered out, the Englishman hauled down the Stars and Stripes, and ran up the British flag, at the same time firing a gun that was not shotted.

"Aha! Mr. Britisher, that made you show yourself as you are," cried Leander, and turning to Ned, he continued:

"Now, sir, we've got to run for it, or our friends won't see us until the end of the war."

"I shall run for it, Leander, so haul down those colors and run up the Stars and Stripes," was the bold reply.

"Ah, but it will make him hot to see how we found him out," cried Leander, and, as though to prove his words, a moment after the sloop-of-war luffed sharp, and sent a broadside flying after the little vessel.

Over them, about them, dashing the spray over them came the iron balls, but not a shot touched the Sea Sorceress.

"Bravo! we were not hit that time, and may we have the same luck at the next broadside!" cried Ned, cheerily.

"Brother, we cannot escape them if we hold on, for in this rough sea the yacht staggers, while the large vessel does not mind it, and is gaining fast," said Nora.

"Yes, sis, that is true; but I intend to hold on to see if I can reach yonder stretch of beach on the island, and then, if they have not given up the chase, I shall run her ashore."

"Just like you, my brave Ned," said Nora.

"It will be better than becoming prisoners, Nora, and we can escape with you to the mainland if they pursue us on the island."

The fishermen crew of the yacht seemed to think that this was the best plan, and they gloried in the boy's pluck, which made him wreck his vessel and take such a hazardous way of escaping his foe.

But the sloop-of-war was determined that the little vessel should not escape, and crowded on every stitch of canvas in pursuit.

Her commander evidently suspected that the skipper of the yacht was running for some channel in the island chain, and he called away several boat crews to be ready to continue the

chase, should they seek refuge in a retreat where the sloop-of-war could not follow them.

Again and again the guns sent their shots flying after the little Sea Sorceress, now and then coming dangerously near, but yet missing, to the great joy of those on board.

At last Ned found himself just off the small stretch of beach, his helm was put hard up, and the Sorceress darted away like an arrow before the wind, while the sea was whitened by the iron hail of a broadside sent from the British vessel, and right in the spot which the little craft had just left.

A cheer broke from the fishermen at their escape, while Ned turned his gaze upon his enemy.

"She is sending boats, for she divines our purpose," he said.

It was true, for the Englishman had quickly luffed up and lowered away a couple of boats filled with men, and they came dashing on in chase, while the sloop continued firing at the yacht in an endeavor to cripple her.

"Stand ready, all! Into the sea, men! Now, Nora, spring with me!"

The command came from the Boy Skipper, in his clear voice, and, as the little yacht was about to dash upon the beach, under full sail, those on board sprung overboard into the surf.

A mighty breaker carried the doomed craft high up on its bosom upon the beach, and it came to a sudden halt with a crash that shivered her timbers to atoms, sent her mast over her bows upon the sand, and she became a wreck.

With strong strokes her crew reached the shore, Nora striking out boldly with the rest and landing by the side of her brother.

"Come, we must lose no time, for the boats are upon us almost," cried Ned, and the party started at a quick pace across the island.

CHAPTER IX.

A FOE'S FRIENDSHIP.

WHEN the party from the wrecked yacht reached the other shore they found it rocky and precipitous, and were forced to go along the coast in search of a place where they could in safety reach the water.

This took time and upon coming again from a point where they had hoped to find a spot where they could gain the water, they saw their pursuers coming across the island.

There were over a score of them, and upon their shoulders they carried a boat, while an officer led them at a quick pace.

"That young officer is determined not to let us escape, lads, and we can only surrender," said Ned, as he saw the boat and the ardent pursuit of their foes.

"Halt or we fire!" cried the English officer, as he caught sight of the fugitives.

But they had already come to a stand-still, realizing the hopelessness of their effort to escape, and stood awaiting the approach of their pursuers, Nora leaning upon the arm of her brother.

Approaching, and his eyes falling upon Nora, the young officer raised his cap politely, and said:

"Ah! I have a fair prisoner it seems; but who commands this party?"

"I do, sir," said Ned quietly.

"Indeed! you are young for a commander, and one who has led us such a daring chase.

"But are these all that were upon the yacht?"

"They are, sir."

"I hope our fire did you no harm, and, had we known there was a lady on board, we would never have fired."

"My sister took the chances with the rest of us, sir, and fortunately none of us were hurt; but may I ask what is your intention regarding us?"

"You are Americans, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the service of your country?"

"I am, sir, or was, on a vessel-of-war that was captured, but my comrades are simply fishermen."

"I am sorry, but I must carry you on board the vessel and let my commander say what is to be done with you."

"You are stronger, sir, and we can but obey."

"From your determined flight, and the character of your craft, which we saw was a yacht, we supposed you carried some important personage or Government dispatches on board, so were determined to capture you at all hazards.

"I am sorry, miss, for the inconvenience and alarm we have put you to," and the officer turned to Nora, while a young midly muttered to another regarding the maiden:

"Lovely as a picture, though a trifle pale and sad-looking."

"She is a beauty, and looks as though she had been ill," returned the other, in the same low tone, while in response to the officer, Nora said:

"You caused me no alarm, sir, and the inconvenience I fear my brother and his crew must suffer even more than I."

"You look pale and tired; may I offer my arm to the boat?" said the officer.

"No, thank you; my brother will aid me," and the party started upon the return for the beach, the British seamen carrying their boat.

Arriving there, they launched it, and, with their prisoners, started upon their return to the vessel, which was lying-to off-shore awaiting the coming back of the boats sent after the fugitives.

As they ascended to the deck of the British vessel, all eyes were turned upon them with evident curiosity, and seeing a lady among the captives, the captain of the sloop-of-war advanced politely to meet them.

But as he did so his eyes fell upon Ned, who caught his glance, and the recognition was mutual, for the Englishman said quickly:

"What! my gallant boy pilot, is it you that I have captured?"

"From my heart I regret that I have given you all this trouble," and he held out his hand to Ned, who presented Nora, and then the two were invited into the elegant cabin of the vessel, and the captain called for wine and refreshments.

Turning to Nora, he said earnestly:

"I assure you I little dreamed that I was

turning my guns upon a lady, and also one who once proved himself a true friend to me, for your brother swam off one night, when I was lying off his home becalmed and a storm threatening, and piloted me to safety.

"I did not command this vessel then, and never would have done so but for him, for we would all have been lost that night; and you may feel assured I owe him a service I can never repay."

Ned did not think it necessary to explain to the Englishman that when he so boldly swam out to save his vessel he thought she was an American cruiser, but he said:

"I must thank you, sir, for a purse of gold which I found in my pocket, and it served me well, I assure you. But as I then refused to accept money for my services I must do so now, and beg that you allow me to return the indebtedness as soon as I can do so."

"Certainly, if you wish it so; but let me relieve your minds at once and say that I will cruise down off your home and land you, while I am sorry that I caused you to wreck your pretty pleasure craft; but I was certain it carried some high dignitary of the American Government, or dispatches of importance, as you paid no attention to my shots.

"I can account for it now, when I am aware that you were her commander, my gallant young friend."

As the British commander intended to set his prisoners free, returning them to their home, the sloop-of-war was put for the Haunted Fort channel under easy sail, for Ned did not care to land until after nightfall, as he feared busy tongues would at once make harm of it.

CHAPTER X.

THE ARREST.

As Nora was still weak from her long illness, the British commander, upon hearing the story of how she came to be on board the yacht, at once said:

"Now, Miss Evans, I will send for our acting surgeon, who is also the young lieutenant who captured you, as our man of medicine was lost overboard in a storm some nights since, and fortunately Sir Lucien Lonsdale having studied medicine for his own pleasure, is able to take his place.

"You doubtless found Sir Lucien a gentleman, and ever will do so," and, although Nora protested the captain insisted and the same handsome young lieutenant, who had so persistently pursued them, came in to see the young girl, and soon gave her the medicines which she really needed to build her up.

At sunset the vessel-of-war came in sight of Fort Cliff, and an hour after dark lay to off-shore, while a boat was ordered alongside to send the party, who had become guests, rather than prisoners, on shore.

Lieutenant Sir Lucien went in charge of the boat, and seemed most attentive to Nora, who could not but appreciate his unassuming kindness, shown her in many little ways.

Ned took the helm to run through the channel, and the night being dark and blustering, the seas were falling with terrific roar upon the reefs and rugged edges of the island, causing

the Englishman to admire the cool courage of the boy as he guided the launch through the numerous dangers that beset its way.

Arriving in the harborage between the islands, Ned wants to land on the nearest shore; but Lieutenant Lonsdale insisted that the fatigue of the walk home would be too great for Nora, and said that he would go right on to the river dock.

For Nora's sake then Ned said no more, and the launch soon after arrived at the pier in the river.

Riverview Mansion loomed up grandly back on the hillside, and lights were visible in many of its windows, as though the captain and his wife were waiting to welcome home their long-lost daughter.

Fancying the young Englishman, and not forgetful of courtesy, Ned invited him up to the mansion; but Sir Lucien would not intrude upon the happy reunion, and, after giving Nora some more advice as to her health, and the medicines to take, which he had carefully prepared for her, he raised his cap in farewell.

Instantly she held out her hand and he warmly grasped it with the low words:

"We shall meet again."

"Leander, you go up with my sister to the mansion, while I run the boat back through the channel.

"Sis, I'll soon be back, and tell father not to forget to look after Leander and his shipmates," called out Ned, as he returned with the English officer to his boat.

"It is a shame to take you away from your home at such a time," said Sir Lucien.

"Oh, no, for I will soon be back," and taking a small surf-skiff in tow to return in, Ned once more took his place at the tiller of the launch, and gave the order in seamanlike tones:

"Give way, lads!"

Out of the river glided the launch, urged by its twelve oars, which Ned had asked to have muffled, so as not to attract attention, and passing through the island and reef channels, was soon after alongside of the sloop-of-war.

The night had now come on to be stormy, the waves were running wild, and the English commander and lieutenant urged Ned to remain on board all night, and not attempt to run back in his little skiff.

But he made light of the danger, and, having borrowed the money from Leander, who had his purse of gold along which had been given his wife, as he intended to buy stores at the village, Ned gave it to Sir Lucien to hand to his captain, saying simply:

"This will square a little debt I owe your commander."

Then with a wave of his tarpaulin, Ned raised his tiny sail, and went flying away on his run homeward.

Safely he went through the channels, and arrived at the river dock.

With a light heart he sprung on shore, and started to join those at the mansion, whom he knew to be anxiously awaiting his return.

But hardly had he taken a dozen steps, when out from behind a row of cedars sprung two men, and he was seized in a grip which he could not shake off.

"What does this mean, Constable Drake?" cried Ned, angrily, as he recognized in the darkness the village officer and his deputy.

"It means, my young gamecock, that you will get your neck stretched for being a spy to the Britishers.

"Oh! we have watched you, and we can prove what we say.

"Come along quiet now, or we'll drag you."

Ned said nothing in reply. His heart was full, and it almost crushed him to feel the irons upon his wrists.

To resist he knew would be useless, and though he was well aware that a loud call for help would bring his father and Leander and his fishermen to his aid, he refrained from doing so, as he felt that the result would be that they would get into trouble.

So he remained silent and passive, and was taken off by the officers who told him that they would give him quarters in the village jail.

CHAPTER XI.

ACCUSED OF TREACHERY.

NED was not one to bewail his fate, though he was a boy in years, and his captors had not the satisfaction of seeing him made wretched when they placed him in a cell at the village jail.

Disappointed at not hearing the boy beg to be let go, or ask regarding his fate, Constable Drake said rudely:

"Now, boy, this is the cell where your mother passed some time when she was up for a witch, and the devil came here and released her; but I guess you won't be that lucky.

"They say as how your pa has come home awful rich and bought out Judge Elmore; but his money won't save you, for you have been spying for the Britishers, and that's hanging, that is."

"You lie, Constable Drake, and you know it, when you call me a spy," said Ned.

"Oh! you may talk, for that is cheap, but you won't talk enough to get off this time, for you are a deserter and a spy."

Ned laughed lightly to show his indifference and responded:

"Do you know why I think you arrested me to-night?"

"No."

"To make money."

"Well, boy?"

"You thought, as my father had returned home rich, you would make me beg off by paying you a large sum; but you don't know me, old man, for I am innocent of wrong and shall take the consequences."

The constable muttered an oath at having been so clearly read by the boy and left the cell, which was nothing more than a strongly-built room upon the upper floor of the little jail, which during the troublous war-times had been garrisoned by a company of home troops.

A guard was placed at the door of Ned's room, to whom he handed a note, accompanied by a gold-piece, with a request that he would send it to his father at Riverview Mansion, so that they would not believe that he had been lost in returning from the English vessel.

The guard called up a comrade, gave him a

piece of silver, while he pocketed the gold-piece, and told him to mount a horse and ride over to Riverview Mansion with the note, and the result was that Captain Evans and Leander put in an appearance at the jail shortly after dawn.

Going to the superior officer, Captain Evans asked what was the meaning of his son's arrest.

Knowing the wealth of the new master of Riverview, the officer treated him with respect, and explained that there was a very serious charge against his son.

"And what is that charge, sir?"

"It is the charge of being a British spy, sir."

Captain Evans turned pale, and said in angry tones:

"You are a lot of fools, who do not know an honest boy when you see one.

"Who are my son's accusers?"

"Constable Drake and his deputy had warrants to arrest him as a deserter from Lieutenant Elmore's schooner-of-war, on board of which he was a cabin-boy.

"In their search for him they discovered that he was in communication with a British vessel off the coast, and they arrested him both as a deserter and a spy."

"They have their charges to prove, Sir Officer."

"They say that they have the proof and will produce it at the trial."

"When is he to be tried?"

"As soon as Lieutenant Elmore can be brought here from Boston, for he is a witness against him."

"Then within a week the trial will take place?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose that I can see my son?"

"No, sir; you cannot, I am sorry to say."

With an imprecation upon fools in general, Captain Evans turned away to seek Constable Drake.

But that worthy could not be found, and the captain was forced to return to his home and report to his wife and daughter what he had discovered, and also to let them know that he feared Ned was in a very bad scrape, for no one in the village seemed at all friendly to him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL.

THE village where Ned the Boy Skipper was to be tried for his life was a place half seaport, half-country, and its denizens were not remarkable for any very great degree of intelligence, though they were a good, honest people in their way.

In those days superstition held considerable sway, and Ned, as the son of a woman who had been known as Elsie the Witch, need expect little favor from the half-soldier, half-sailor militia company that were to be his judges.

It is true all knew that Elsie, the Witch of the Haunted Fort, had lately become a changed woman, throwing aside her weird attire and ways for a dress more becoming to her position as the wife of Captain Norcross Evans and the mistress of Riverview Mansion.

But there were many who believed that Elsie

had conjured up the luck for herself, and still looked upon her with awe and superstitious dread.

From the time of Ned's capture by the constable, the officers of the militia company swelled up with importance, and the capturer became a hero in the eyes of the community.

It was certain that he did have papers of arrest for Ned as a deserter from the navy, and his zeal had enabled him to fasten upon the youth a more serious charge, as a spy for the British, and, young as was the accused, there were those who were willing to take oath that he would hang, if found guilty, and that he would be proven innocent no one believed, after Constable Drake had said that he would prove his accusation against him.

As it was feared that an attempt would be made to rescue Ned, from the fact that a number of strange fishermen had come to the village, a double guard had been placed over the jail.

But no such an attempt was made, and the day of trial came round and the boy prisoner was still safe in the clutches of his enemies.

The trial was to be held in the Town Hall, and the village was crowded to overflowing with people from the adjacent country.

As it was war time, the local authorities yielded to the military, and a court-martial of officers was already called upon the case, and the witnesses were ready to give their testimony.

Captain Evans, his wife and Nora were early on hand, and although Mrs. Evans looked little like the woman they had known as Elsie the Witch, the crowd stood in awe of her, and freely allowed the little party to pass on to good seats in the front.

Then the major, who was to be the judge, took his seat, the officers of the court-martial came in, the prisoner was led to his seat before his accusers, and the trial was begun.

Ned was calm as a man, bowed pleasantly to his parents and sister, glanced indifferently over the crowded room, and then turned his gaze upon the witnesses.

"Your name is Ned Norcross, boy?" began the major, in a pompous manner, meant to awe the youth.

But the reply was prompt:

"You are mistaken; my name is Ned Evans."

"Ah! yet you were once known as Ned Norcross."

"Yes, it was my father's Christian name, and my mother assumed it to escape from her foes, who sought to destroy her that they might enjoy the fortune they would inherit by her death!"

"Aha! your mother is the one whom they called, hereabout, Elsie the Witch?"

"Yes, because my mother's sorrows and sufferings had affected her mind and she acted somewhat strangely, a lot of superstitious fools called her a witch," was the sharp reply, and it struck home to many.

"Well, as there is no doubt as to your identity, boy, I will go on to ask you other questions."

"I am ready, sir, to answer any question you wish to ask."

"Then tell me if you were ever in the United States Navy?"

"I was, and suppose I am yet."

"You shipped in the service?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"In Baltimore."

"In what capacity?"

"That of cabin-boy."

"On what vessel?"

"The brig-of-war, Boxer."

"Why did you desert from her?"

"I did not desert her."

"You left her?"

"I was ordered from the Boxer, with a number of others, to go as a crew upon a schooner-of-war just fitted out at Portland."

"You made your mark as a seaman upon that vessel's papers then?"

"Oh no, for I am not so ignorant as that, thanks to my good mother, so I wrote my name."

"You can write then?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Who commanded that schooner-of-war?"

"Lieutenant Elmore."

"Do you see him in this room?"

"I do not."

"Had you ever seen him before the day he sailed in the schooner as commander?"

"I had not, nor did I see him on that day, for I was sick in my hammock when the schooner sailed, and we were off this coast when I got up."

"The schooner ran into the river haven that night, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. I piloted her in."

"You?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, you were cabin-boy on board."

"I was pilot that night, for we were chased by an English sloop-of-war and would have been captured had we not run into the river harbor, so, as I knew the channel, I ran her in."

This was evidently news to many present, and the major glanced at a letter he held in his hand and said:

"I have here a letter from Lieutenant Elmore, who was unable to appear as witness against you, and he does not speak of you as other than a cabin-boy."

"Why should he?" was the blunt question of Ned.

"He says," and the major read aloud from the letter—

"The boy you speak of is the same who was with me.

"He was cabin-boy on the schooner, and deserted the night we reached the river haven."

"If, as you say, he has been discovered to be a British spy, he is without doubt the one who piloted the sloop-of-war in that captured my vessel, and I heard from a seaman that he was really the Englishman's pilot."

"If found guilty, he should certainly be hanged, and his fate will be an example and warning to others along the Maine Coast, who can be too easily bribed by gold to aid our foes."

"Now this is what the lieutenant says, and you can see that his testimony is sadly against you."

"Yes, sir, I see it is," said Ned with a smile.

"It seems to please you," angrily said the major, nettled at the boy's indifference.

"I do not care one way or the other."

"You will when this trial is over."

"If it is decided that I am guilty beforehand, why try me?" came the pat question, and the major and his officers winced under the shot, and Constable Drake was called as a witness against the young sailor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONFESSION.

"CONSTABLE DRAKE, who is this prisoner?" asked the major, when that officer had taken the witness stand.

"He's a boy terror, your Honor, that is known as Cabin-Boy Ned, the Boy Skipper, and the Pilot of the Isles; but his real name, as I know him, is Ned Norcross, or Evans."

"You have held a warrant for his arrest for some little time, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"On what charge?"

"Desertion from the great American Navy, your Honor."

"And you arrested him on this charge?"

"I arrested him on my papers for desertion, sir; but I have another charge to make against him, which is worse than deserting his ship."

"Well, sir, what charge is it you have to make?"

"I accuse him of being a British spy."

"Indeed! Will you state upon what grounds you make this very serious charge?"

"I will tell you, sir."

"Me and Pindar, my deputy, your Honor, has been looking for the boy for some time, and t'other night, sir, we was watching up near his new home, where Judge Elmore once lived, you know, and we seen a large launch come into the river."

"We had previously noticed a Britisher coming along the coast before dark, and seen his lights as he lay to off the Graveyard Reefs."

"Well, sir, Pindar and me run down to the Riverview pier, and from the bushes where we hid, we seen the prisoner talking to the officer of the boat."

"Then they got into the launch, and with the boy's surf-skiff in tow, went out of the river."

"After some time the boy came back alone in his skiff, and so we just seized him."

"You are sure the vessel was an English craft?" asked the major.

"Yes, sir, certain; for we seen her the next day, when she went in chase of an American privateer that hove in sight."

Pindar, the deputy, then gave his evidence, which was the same as that given by the constable, and then the major turned to the young prisoner with the air of a man who had made up his mind that the boy was guilty, and there was nothing too bad to accuse him of.

"Well, young sir, you have heard the testimony of these honorable gentlemen against you, so what have you to say against it?" asked the major.

"I have to say that appearances seem to be against me, sir; but I can explain all," was the calm reply.

"I do not see how."

"Am I to be permitted to say a word in my own defense?"

"Certainly, for we hold the scales of justice here, and we are, like Justice, blind."

"Then, sir, to begin, I will say that I asked permission of Lieutenant Elmore to visit my mother, upon arriving in the river; but, although I had saved his vessel, he refused, and even rudely refused when he knew who I was."

"He went on shore then, and I asked the second officer, but he too was forced to refuse, as Lieutenant Elmore had given orders that no one was to leave the ship."

"I knew that the schooner was to sail at daylight, and that there was no telling how long it would be before I could again see my mother and sister."

"I had run off to sea, and I wished to beg their forgiveness."

"I had just saved the schooner and the lives of all, and yet was refused permission to go ashore, and it hurt me."

"So, as I was allowed to turn in for the night, I determined to go home, and be back before daybreak."

"I slipped over the side into the river, and swam ashore."

"Then I ran to my home to find my sister, as all supposed then, to be dead, and as she was believed by my mother to have been murdered by Lieutenant Elmore, for his act drove her to attempt suicide, as all now know, so I need not keep it a secret, I could not return to his vessel, while his refusal to permit me to go to my home, when he knew who I was, I then understood."

"Before dawn the English vessel was piloted by some one into the river and captured the American schooner, while her commander, who was alone on shore escaped."

"Were you that vessel's pilot?" asked the major.

"I was not."

"Do you know who it was?"

All breathlessly awaited the reply, for though some believed that the boy had been the Englishman's pilot, many more did not so believe, and not one suspected Elsie of having been.

Calm and pale she sat between her husband and daughter, her gaze riveted upon her son.

Once she was almost tempted to arise and state that she had urged him to be the pilot of the English vessel to get revenge upon Lieutenant Elmore, and that, he refusing, she had herself acted as the pilot; but her husband restrained her, saying in a low tone:

"Be calm, Elsie, for one is enough, in our small circle, to be under the ban now."

"Do you know who was the traitor that brought that British vessel in to capture Lieutenant Elmore's schooner?" repeated the major.

"I do know who was the pilot."

A deathlike silence fell upon all present at this confession.

"Who was the traitor?" cried the judge, in angry tones, after a pause and silence that was painful.

"The person was no traitor."

"Who was he, I asked?"

"I will not tell you."

"Hah! you refuse?"

"I do."

"You insult this august court-martial of honorable and distinguished gentlemen and officers?" cried the military judge, working himself into a rage.

"I mean no insult in refusing, sir."

"I simply decline to answer your question."

"I demand it."

"And I still refuse," was the cool reply.

"You confess that you know?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, gentlemen, this confession will condemn this prisoner without other charges being made against him," almost savagely said the major, turning toward the officers of the court-martial.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STRANGE WITNESS.

"PARDON me, but I do not intend that this shall be a one-sided trial to hang a boy."

"He is entitled to a full hearing, and to witnesses in his own behalf."

The clear voice of the speaker fell like a thunderbolt upon all, especially the court-martial.

All eyes were turned upon him, and the major slightly winced under the charge that he was trying to hang a boy.

"Who are you, sir, that dares interrupt this august court?" he cried, though he knew well who it was.

"I am one, sir, who sought to see that poor boy in prison, and was refused."

"I am one who has here in this room eminent lawyers from Boston and Portland watching your criminal management of this trial, and my name is Norcross Evans."

The words were delivered in clear, measured tones, and the major turned pale and glanced quickly over the assemblage to see those "eminent lawyers."

He had noticed strangers present whom he was fairly paralyzing by his importance; but now he felt small when he discovered that they were sitting in judgment upon his conduct of the trial.

He knew that Captain Evans was rich, very rich, and had certain influence with Government, for he had obtained a commission as a privateer captain, and he was alarmed that he had allowed his dread and hatred of Elsie the Witch, with a desire for self-aggrandizement to carry him to such extremes against a boy, who, after all might be innocent, in spite of appearances against him.

To use a homely, but old and appropriate expression, the major was thoroughly scared, and determined to "crawl," so he said quietly:

"I do not wonder, Captain Evans, that you take deep interest in your son, but he has gotten himself into an awkward box, and we must not let him escape, if guilty."

"No, sir, if guilty, I would myself hang him to the yard-arm of my own vessel, son though he be of mine."

"But he is not guilty of the crimes you charge him with, and I demand that he be allowed to tell his own story."

An applause greeted these words, which showed that the tide was turning in behalf of the hitherto friendless boy.

"He shall give what testimony he likes."

"Arise, Master Ned, and explain your being with the officer of a British vessel-of-war the other night," and the major turned upon Ned with a smile that was meant to be patronizing and kind, but which missed the mark sadly.

"If you wish a witness to state that I was not the pilot of the British vessel in to attack the schooner, my mother can testify that I visited her that night in her cottage and never left the shore."

"Your mother, the—"

But the major did not speak the word, *witch*, that was upon his tongue, for he caught the eye of Captain Evans.

"Yes, sir, my mother," repeated Ned.

"Ah, yes; well, madam, may I ask you, under oath, you know, if your son was the pilot of the Englishman that night?"

"He was not, sir," said Mrs. Evans calmly.

"Ah! and may I ask, under oath, remember, if you know who was?"

"I believe that I am not on trial," was the contemptuous remark of Mrs. Evans, and the major flushed, and again turned to Ned.

"Now, sir, the question is, what were you doing with the English officer?"

"I left my home, sir, on a yacht, to go after my sister, who had been ill for a long time at an island up the coast.

"Returning, we were chased by an English vessel, a sloop-of-war, and to escape, I beached my craft.

"But we were hotly pursued by a party in boats and captured, and the English commander was kind enough to bring us off our home and land us.

"He sent his launch ashore with us, and I piloted the boat out through the channel, returning in my surf-skiff.

"That, sir, is the story of my being a British spy, as Constable Drake tries to make me out, and of which you would never have heard, any more than of my being a deserter, had I bribed the constable and his deputy to release me."

"The Lord forgive him," groaned Constable Drake, while Pindar fervently gasped.

"Amen!"

"Have you witnesses that the British commander captured and released you as stated?" asked the major.

"I have."

"Who are they?"

"My sister and the fishermen from the islands, who were with me on the yacht."

"Ah! will you testify to the case as stated by your brother, miss?" and the major turned to Nora, and noticing her beauty mentally observed.

"Pretty as a satin slipper, and rich, too. I guess, Major Ezra Norton, you have made a mistake in pushing the boy, for you are not too old to marry yet."

Then he smiled his sweetest, which, however, was but a grin, and waited for Nora's reply.

"The facts are as my brother has stated, sir," she said in her soft, musical voice.

"Aha! thank you, miss."

"I will accept your testimony as *verbatim*, without seeking to question the fishermen on this point, but, not being with your brother, Miss Evans, when he returned with the English officer,

you cannot give an account of what then occurred, and that is when Constable Drake swears, yes, swears, that he boarded the Englishman, and, alone as he then was, gave testimony of a detrimental character regarding our glorious Government and country."

The major glanced around for an approval, feeling that he had made a few clinching and eloquent remarks, and turning to his colleagues he held a short conversation with them, the result of which was that he said:

"This court-martial would be glad to find the prisoner guiltless of the charges against him, but, it being asserted by an officer of the law that he returned on board the British vessel and there remained some time, it has the appearance of guilt, and nothing short of a reliable witness from the said British vessel, swearing in his favor, could clear the accused of this serious accusation, for which we will be bound to hold him as guilty."

"Permit me to testify in the behalf of young Evans, sir, and to the falsity of the charge made against him by those narrow-minded officers of the law."

At the first words of the speaker Nora Evans uttered a low, startled cry and Ned's face became very pale.

Upon him every eye was riveted, and other than the young prisoner and his sister, no one seemed to recognize him, unless it was some few of a group of women over in the corner of the room.

"Who are you, sir, for you are an utter stranger to this court?" asked the major, fixing his eyes upon the strange witness.

CHAPTER XV.

A SAILOR'S SACRIFICE.

THE stranger was a tall man, elegantly formed, and attired in an undress naval uniform.

His face was darkly bronzed by exposure, frank, fearless, and the features were refined and well cut, while he had about him the air of one "to the manor born."

His eyes were dark-blue, his hair wavy and golden, and his face was beardless, as was the fashion of that time.

As he advanced toward the major's seat, Ned arose and made a sign, as though in warning to him, but unheeding it, and with a pleasant smile, the stranger walked up to the witness-stand, where had stood the constable and his deputy in giving their testimony.

"Who are you, may I ask, sir?" repeated the major, gazing with considerable deference upon the stranger, whose mien certainly commanded respect.

"I am a witness, sir, in behalf of that gallant Boy Skipper," was the reply.

"What have you to say in his favor, sir?"

"I have to say that the man who accuses him of being a traitor to his country, utters a lie in his false throat," was the ringing reply, and the words created a sensation.

"This is strong language, sir," said the major, standing in a certain awe of the witness.

"It is the truth."

"You are in a position to know, sir?"

"I am."

"You are a naval officer, sir?"

"I am a sailor and an officer, sir, holding the rank of first lieutenant," was the cool reply.

"Then your testimony is worthy of credence, sir."

"I certainly never have had my word doubted."

"And you assert that the boy is no traitor?"

"I assert that this trial is a farce, and that some base motives have prompted his accusers in bringing the charges against him which they have."

"He was no more the pilot of the British sloop-of-war, that ran in and captured the American schooner, than I was, and he has stated wholly the truth in regard to his chase and capture by the English vessel, and his return to run the boat out to sea again."

"Not a seaman of that boat landed, though an officer did do so to aid Miss Evans ashore, and her brother did not go on board the British vessel, but returned in his skiff as soon as he had piloted it through the channel."

"May, I ask, sir, how you know all this?"

"I was an eye-witness to the entire affair."

"Ah! as an American naval officer?"

"No, sir, I am an Englishman, and the senior lieutenant on the British sloop-of-war which you accuse that noble boy of going on board of as a spy."

Had the sloop-of-war sent a broadside from the sea, miles away, crashing into the little town-hall, it would not have created a greater confusion than did the bold words of the Englishman.

When the major could find words to speak, he said:

"You are, sir—"

"Sir Lucien Lonsdale, sir, a senior officer in his British Majesty's service afloat," was the calm reply.

"And what do you here, sir, in this free land of America?" shouted the major, and he looked as though he expected to see a party of British seamen dash into the room and whisk him off of his judicial seat.

"Two days ago, sir, while cruising along your coast, in search of a prize, we captured a fisherman, and he gave us the information that you were about to try the prisoner there as a traitor, for having boarded our vessel."

"Knowing his innocence, as I was the officer who captured him and then landed him and his party, I determined to save him if I could, for my informant says that you intended to hang him, and from what I have seen of your conduct of this trial, I do not doubt but that you did so intend."

"I therefore landed upon an island, where there is a fishing-hamlet, took the man with me who had told us the story of the prisoner's danger, and then surrendered myself to them to be brought here to testify in behalf of the youth."

"Back there you see my fishermen guards, and you already have heard my testimony as to the falsity of the charges against this gallant boy, who, willing to serve his country, is hampered and persecuted by a party of stay-at-home militia who have not the courage of the opinions they flaunt so grandly."

The major and his colleagues turned deathly pale at this, and there was war in their eyes against the bold Englishman, who had certainly won the admiration of the crowd.

"Well, Sir Britisher, I will take your testimony in favor of this boy, and upon it find him not guilty of the charges against him; but you, having placed yourself in our power, I shall hold as a prisoner, and send you to Boston under a strong guard where the chances are that you will be shot as a spy, for having come into our great and glorious land to see what you can find out regarding us."

"As you please, sir; I submit myself to you as a prisoner of war," was the calm reply of the Englishman, and while Ned the Boy Skipper was set free, he was held as a captive to take the chances of his noble self-sacrifice.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAILORS TO THE RESCUE.

NED was certainly most deeply worried at the turn affairs had taken, for he disliked to owe his escape to one who he felt would be sacrificed through his noble act of friendship to save him.

He had not expected such nobleness in a foe, and it touched him to the heart, while Nora was deeply moved by the Englishman's daring deed to save her brother.

"He said we would meet again; but little he dreamed then how soon it would be," murmured Nora, as she drove homeward with her parents and Ned in the carriage.

Ned had wished to remain with the British officer, to see what he could do for him; but his father bade him come along to Riverview with them.

"But he will think that I have deserted him," urged Ned.

"He will discover to the contrary when we act," was the calm reply of the captain.

"Then you do intend to do something to save him, father?" asked Nora.

"I shall start for Boston to see what I can do, and will see the President and lay the facts before him, if necessary, while the two lawyers I had here to look after your interest, Ned, and who return in the stage this afternoon, will make their report before the garbled statements of that big-headed major arrive," answered Captain Evans.

As the carriage reached the steps leading to the front piazza, a horseman was seen coming at full speed along the highway bordering the river-bank, and which led from the village.

He was urging his horse hard, and the animal was covered with foam and dust.

"It is Tip, the son of the tavern-keeper," cried Ned.

The next instant a youth dashed up to the door.

His face was pale, in spite of his hard exercise, and it was evident that he had ridden at top speed all the way from the village.

"Ned! cap'n! Pa says come a-runnin' back to the town, for they is stirrin' up a riot, and says they intends ter hang ther Britisher," cried the youth in breathless haste.

"Ah! who is doing this?" calmly asked the captain.

"The folks, and they is red-hot ag'in' the Britisher, and they swears they'll hang him."

"Come, Ned, we must return at once, and lose no time, so get your belt of arms and we'll be off, for that brave Englishman shall not die if we can save him."

"Quick, Dan, throw the saddles upon the horses."

The servant addressed ran to the stables to obey, while Ned and his father hastily armed themselves, and were ready for their ride by the time the horses were brought round.

Ned at once sprung into the saddle, while the horse held for the captain suddenly became alarmed and jerked away from the groom, to run galloping about the ground.

"Ther Britisher will be strung up afore you git there," shouted Tip, and his words caused the captain to call out:

"Go, Ned, and I will follow; but do not be rash."

"Ay, ay, sir," cried Ned, and his horse sprung away like an arrow from a bow, leaving Tip far behind.

Like the very wind Ned rode on to the village, dashed up the street, and into the back yard of the tavern, before which a large and excited crowd had gathered.

Ned instantly sprung to the ground, and was met by the host of the tavern.

"Glad you have come, boy, for you've got the nerve of a dozen men."

"Where's your pa?"

"Coming."

"And my son Tip?"

"I distanced him. But the crowd seem wild."

"They are, and between you and me, lad, I think the major would just as soon see 'em string up the Englishman, though he pretends not; but you see he has got but two men to guard him, and he's gone up home, hoping they'll hang him while he's away."

"And they'll do it, for listen to that!" cried Ned, as a loud voice shouted:

"Come, men, we lose time! Let us hang the cursed British spy now!"

A shout greeted these words, and the crowd moved toward the piazza of the tavern, the prisoner and his guards being upon it.

As for the two guards, in spite of their flaming militia uniform, they looked terribly frightened, and held on to their muskets as though they were afraid they would go off and hurt them.

The prisoner, however, was calm and unmoved, though a trifle pale, and gazed into the faces of the excited crowd with a look of perfect fearlessness, and a sneer at their efforts to frighten him.

Seeing how matters stood, Ned was glad to discover, coming in at the back door of the tavern, Leander the fisherman and his shipmates, who had been on the yacht with him.

"Leander, just stand in the hall there ready to support me, for that crowd shall not kill Sir Lucien," said Ned.

"No, sir, they shall not, the cowards, and we'll back you with our knives and hands, which are all we have."

"They will do—Ah! they are coming, I see!"

and Ned sprung out upon the piazza, directly in front of the Englishman and his guards, and confronted the excited crowd, who were at last led on to their cowardly work by a huge fresh-water boatman, who shouted:

"Come, messmates, and help me string up the Britisher! We have already lost too much time."

"Back, my man, if you don't wish to die!" cried Ned, confronting him, a pistol in one hand, a cutlass in the other.

For an instant there was dead silence, and the crowd gazed upon the daring youth in a startled kind of way.

Then the huge boatman, having recovered from his astonishment, again advanced to the steps of the piazza, for he had shrunk back at the unexpected obstacle that had so suddenly barred his way.

"What! Does you interfere, when it hain't been long since you come near being strung up too?" cried the boatman.

"I do interfere, and you will find it out if you press me," was the calm reply.

"Come, lads, let us board the tavern and seize the Britisher!" yelled the riverman, who, like most fresh-water sailors, affected sea terms.

"Back all! This is no deck, but the first man who boards it, as that bully says, I will kill!" cried Ned, in a voice that reached every ear.

As he spoke he leveled his pistol full at the breast of the burly leader.

"Come, lads, he won't dare fire, and he's nothing but a boy," shouted the bully, and raising his sheath-knife threateningly he sprung toward the daring boy.

But Ned kept his threat to the letter, for his finger touched the trigger, the flash and report came together, and the riverman fell dead at his feet.

With cries of horror the crowd shrunk back, until a voice in the rear, out of danger, cried out: "Avenge our leader!"

Then, with yells, they moved toward the brave boy once more, but again came to a sudden halt, as there glided out upon the piazza, from the tavern hallway, Captain Evans, Leander and his shipmates, and the fishermen to whom the British officer had surrendered, to come to aid Ned by his testimony, and who had been awed by the crowd from protecting him.

"Ho, sailors to the rescue!" cried Ned, as he saw this support, and seizing a musket from one of the two guards over the prisoner, he moved forward, while with him advanced the solid line of seamen, who were determined to protect the British officer, enemy though he was.

This bold front scattered the crowd in all directions, and many, cooling down from their excitement, were anxious not to have been thought among the rioters.

As Ned acted in self-defense, and wholly in the right, even Constable Drake dared not attempt to arrest him for the killing of the ring-leader of the mob, and Captain Evans gave him to understand that he would stand no more trifling, while he said:

"In your hands, sir, I leave this prisoner, and you will do well to keep him from harm, as you will find that you will be held strictly accountable for your actions."

This cowed the constable, for he began to feel that Captain Evans was going to be a power in the land, and that he was a man to wish the friendship of, rather than the ill-will.

So he said:

"I'll see that he is cared for, captain, and no harm comes to him, until I turn him over to the guard that goes with him to Boston to-morrow."

"Keep him here at the tavern, and remain with him," ordered the captain, and turning to the English officer, he continued:

"Sir Lucien, I have to thank you, sir, for your kindness to my children while on your vessel, and more lately for your noble self-sacrifice in coming to save Ned from the ugly scrape he was in."

"Do not speak of it, Captain Evans, for Ned has more than returned the favor, I assure you; and if he was a British boy the king would soon send him a commission."

After conversing a short while longer with the Englishman, Ned and the captain mounted their horses and started homeward, the latter telling Leander and his shipmates to remain in the village until the guards had departed with their prisoner, and ordering the host of the tavern to entertain the lads with the best he had at his expense.

"Should there be any further trouble brewing, Leander, send for me with all speed," said the captain, as he rode off with his daring son, of whom he seemed so justly proud, for he remarked warmly as they left the village:

"Ned, my boy, you did work to-day that few men would dare attempt."

"I am sorry, father, that I had to take life, but I would have died rather than that they should have harmed that splendid man, our enemy though he be," was the response of the brave boy.

CHAPTER XVII.

WAYLAIN BY GHOSTS.

THE excitement following the arrest of the English officer was so great that the major, who feared he had made another mistake in urging on the mob, as he really had done, was anxious to get the prisoner off his hands, so detailed an officer and two men to go in the stage with him to Boston.

Major Bounce, as he was inappropriately named, did not wish to do one act to anger Captain Evans any more than he had done.

In the first place he admired a man who was rich.

The richer a man was the more he possessed the major's admiration, and he had taken pains to find out, and discovered that the captain was by far the wealthiest man of whose acquaintance he had ever boasted.

Then, too, he had an idea that the captain had some influence with the Government, while the host of the tavern told him that his belief was that the new master of Riverview Mansion was secretly an officer in the United States service.

"I made a mistake in pushing the boy as I did; but I let him off so nicely that I am sure I won the captain's gratitude and the admiration of his lovely daughter, too.

"How beautiful she is, and how she seemed to hang upon my every utterance.

"Well, Major Bounce, you are not so bad-looking after all, and you may some day win a pretty wife, and a rich one to boot, for there are but two children to divide the property.

"Go in and win, you sly dog," and the major gave his own ribs a punch with his long, bony fingers, and smiled in complacent self-conceit.

The hour arrived for the departure of the stage the following afternoon, and all of the villagers were gathered about the tavern to see the prisoner start.

The major was there in full regimental uniform, and his sword dangling about his long legs nearly tripped him up several times.

He looked self-important, and tried to look austere, but the effort was a failure, the sternness about his mouth had the appearance of one who has eaten unripe persimmons.

"Constable Drake, is your prisoner ready?" called out the major to that worthy, who stood at an open window on the second floor of the tavern.

"He is, sir."

"Then bring him out, for my aide-de-camp and his escort are ready to receive him," was the pompous command.

The aide-de-camp was a fat young man who did not have a happy look.

His uniform set in wrinkles about his body, his sword was longer than his short legs, and his hat was too small for his bullet-shaped head.

His escort consisted of two militiamen, armed to the teeth, for they carried a musket, a sword and a dragoon-pistol each, and they also had an unhappy look, for some wag had hinted that a mob was on the highway, awaiting to riddle the coach with bullets, being perfectly willing, as patriotic American citizens, to kill a trio of soldiers, so that they might also slay an enemy.

"Lieutenant Van Voost, there is your prisoner.

"Prisoner, there is your guard," said Major Bounce, as Drake and his deputy appeared with Sir Lucien Lonsdale between them.

A flush was upon the face of the young officer as he held out his hands, which were ironed, and asked:

"Is this the way, sir, an English officer is treated by Americans?"

"You come under the head of a spy, sir, and should not complain," returned the major.

"And you, sir, come under the head of a major of militia; and I should not complain, for an American officer of the regulars knows the courtesy due a prisoner," was the retort of the Englishman.

"Lieutenant Van Voost, here is the key to the manacles, and you are to be careful that your prisoner does not escape.

"Also, sir, you are to defend him with your life, should any effort be made to release him or to harm him, for remember, sir, he is a prisoner of our glorious country."

"Yes, major," said the lieutenant nervously, taking the key and thrusting it in the holster of his dragoon pistol.

"Now, coachman, here are your passengers, and drive through with haste, for no one else goes along; and mind you, lay on the whip if any one attempts to halt you."

"Yee, sah," said the stage-driver, who was a runaway negro from Virginia that had drifted up into Maine and become a whip on a stage route.

A crack of the whip and the stage was off, Sir Lucien seated upon the back seat alongside of the fat lieutenant, and the two soldiers confronting him with a look of boldness upon their faces that they were far from feeling.

Charcoal Sam, as the negro stage-driver was called, sent his horses along at a lively pace for the first relay, where a halt was made for supper.

Then just a little while before sunset the coach started again, and the road led toward the sea.

Charcoal Sam was always anxious to pass one spot on the road before darkness should overtake him.

This was where the highway ran along in view of the sea by day, and where once had stood a fishing-hamlet.

But those who had once lived there had nearly all been massacred by Indians one night, and the others had fled to safer quarters.

Some of the huts still remained, desolate and decaying, with the windows and doors swinging about with a creaking noise that sounded like the shrieks of the dying.

Upon one side of the highway was the hamlet, and upon the other, dotting the slope of the hill, was the village of the dead.

There rested fully a hundred bodies, and above their heads the pine trees sighed a requiem.

The place was wild and picturesque by day, but at night, with the roar of the surf near by, the deserted hamlet, the windows and doors creaking in the wind, and the sighing pines, it was a place of desolation and solitude to be avoided by the timid.

Never but once had Charcoal Sam allowed himself to be caught there after nightfall, and then he got free drinks at the taverns at each end of the route by telling of the ghosts he had seen.

All looked lovely for him to get by on this occasion before the shadows began to lengthen into gloom, and he sent his team whirling along.

But suddenly one of his horses went lame, and Sam was compelled to come down to a slower pace.

This delayed him, and he was pained to see nightfall before he reached the old deserted hamlet.

With the nightfall the moon rose, and Charcoal Sam muttered:

"Now de ghosteses walk sure."

He wished he could turn back, wanted to be back in Old Virginia, and would have been willing to go back into slavery, rather than go through that hamlet by night.

But he knew that he had to go on, and he nerved himself to the task.

Suddenly the hamlet came in view, then the white head-boards above the graves on the hillside, and the pines sighed more mournfully, the surf fell with a hollow, sepulchral sound upon the shore, and Charcoal Sam was utterly wretched.

Could he have sent his horses flying along the

rough road he would gladly have done so; but the off-leader was going almost upon three legs and could not be hurried, so he was forced to go slow.

He reached the hamlet upon one side, and had just begun to cross a little rivulet that ran across the road, when suddenly a white form stood in his way and even the lame leader shied violently.

"De ghost! 'fore gracious dis am a warnin' o' evil, an' I is a gone nigger," cried Charcoal Sam.

Could he have turned his team in that narrow road, he would have done so quickly, and that lame horse would have been lashed into a speed that was terrific.

But he could not, and he sat like one paralyzed.

Then, to his horror there glided toward the stage upon either side a white-robed form.

Turning his gaze Sam beheld a fourth ghost in the rear, and more weird forms in sight.

"Oh golly! de Judgment Day hev come, and dey is all risin', do' I didn't hear Gabr'el blow he horn," groaned the poor negro, in an agony of terror.

"What is it, driver?" called out Lieutenant Van Voost.

"Jist look out an' see, boss."

"See what?"

"De graveyard hev bu'sted loose, boss, an' de ghosteses is waylaid us."

One glance out of the window, and *Aide-de-camp* Van Voost uttered a terrific yell, which was echoed by his soldiers as they too saw the ghastly forms coming toward them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOY SKIPPER'S RUSE.

WITHOUT a thought of other than the horrid objects upon which they gazed, and a desire to get out of the way as quickly as possible, Lieutenant Van Voost dashed open the doors of the stage and sprung out, just as Charcoal Sam had nerved himself for flight and jumped down from his box.

The lieutenant and his soldiers were tripped up with their first bound, by their swords, and this caused them to unfasten their belts and cast them away, and then a foot-race was begun that was ludicrous in the extreme, for, fat as he was, as was his duty, being an officer, Lieutenant Van Voost led the way.

Upon each side of the coach they beheld what certainly appeared to be a shrouded form, and back on the hillsides were more coming slowly toward them, and waving their arms in a most weird fashion.

Back up the road tore the frightened quartette, either most equally matched in speed, or keeping close together from the belief that in unity there is strength.

And, amazed at the conduct of his guards, the English officer also glanced out, and the weird forms were revealed to him, too.

Sir Lucien was above superstition, and his was a fearless nature, so he did not flinch at the sight, but muttered:

"This is some horrid mockery of country boys, to frighten the negro and his passengers;

but I will take advantage of it to escape, if possible.

"Ah! there lies the lieutenant's sword, and I remember that he dropped the key of my manacles into his pistol-holster.

"Now I am free."

Stooping quickly he soon found the key, and managed to get it into the lock of his irons and release himself.

Then he grasped a pistol and sword, just as the nearest white-robed form halted near him.

"Well, do you attempt to bar my way?" coolly asked the English officer, as he presented his pistol.

"No, indeed, Sir Lucien; but I could not speak before for laughing at that fat lieutenant, his soldiers and the negro, the way they did run.

"Hark! you can hear the patter of their feet yet."

This strange remark came from one of the ghosts, while the others gathered around, seven in all, and presented certainly a most ghastly crew.

"The voice of the gallant Boy Skipper, as I live!" cried the British officer.

"Yes, Sir Lucien, and I played my little game to save you.

"Here, this ghost is my sister, Nora, who knew of this deserted hamlet and graveyard, and proposed the plot, and that midnight prowler is Leander, while the others are his shipmates.

"We came down the coast in two surf-skiffs, and Leander went over to the stage station and pulled a shoe off of one of the horses so that he would quickly go lame on these rocky roads and fetch Charcoal Sam along here after dark.

"So now you have our little ruse."

Sir Lucien had listened in silence to the quickly told story of Ned, but now he said, earnestly:

"From my heart I thank you all, my friends, for such I may call you, though our lands are at war with each other.

"But now, give me a small boat, let me put to sea and give you no further trouble on my account, for you will only place yourselves in peril by befriending me."

"No, Sir Lucien, we have a plan for your escape, and you must be governed by my brother until we can regain your vessel.

"As for to-night, we will go back home before daybreak, and no one will suspect us of playing ghost; but let us not delay here," and Nora led the way toward the shore.

"What shall I do with the horses, sir?" called out Leander to Ned.

"Oh, yes; just unhitch them and turn them loose, and they'll return to the station," answered Ned, with another hearty laugh, as he recalled the race of the gallant soldiers.

At the beach Leander and his men got into one skiff, while Ned, the British officer and Nora entered the other, and the former called out:

"You can make your island by day, Leander, and when the sloop comes along after Sir Lucien, tell the captain to lay to one week from to-night off the Haunted Fort, and I will bring the lieutenant out to his vessel."

"Ay, ay, sir, and luck to you," answered Leander, as he started on his return to his island home, while the other skiff, urged by a pair of oars in Ned's hands, went close inshore on its way toward the Haunted Fort.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIEUTENANT ELMORE MEETS A FRIEND.

"WELL, Elmore, I learn that you have sold your place up in Maine."

The speaker was a young man who had been a purser in the navy and whom Lieutenant Elmore knew well.

They had met upon the street in Boston, when after a greeting the ex-purser had addressed the question to the young officer regarding the Riverview Mansion.

"Yes, my duties keep me here, and my father was tired of living alone up at Riverview, so I sold out and came to the city."

"Then you can tell me all that I wish to know about getting there, for I take the stage to-night for your old home, as I understand it was."

"Indeed! What can carry you there?" asked Elmore with considerable interest.

"I don't mind telling you, though it is a secret; but you know I left the navy to accept a position in a large mercantile house."

"Yes, Rodney, I do remember it."

"Now the house failed, and that ruined me; but one of the partners had some property belonging to his wife, which he is to get money on, and we are to put it in a privateer, for there is more money in privateering now against the English than in anything else."

"If you are successful, there certainly is."

"So we think, and we have a schooner now building that is just what we want, and I am now going up to Maine to get the money for her."

"To get the money in Maine?"

"Yes."

"From whom there, pray?"

"The purchaser of your home."

"Norcross Evans?"

"Yes, the captain is an old friend of my employer, and he wrote him for a loan of the money on his notes, secured by property."

"And his answer?"

"That he would invest the money for him that was needed, without security, in case he was to have one-third interest in the profits."

"Of course, my partner in the enterprise jumped at this, and Captain Norcross, who, it seems, keeps his gold in his mansion, wrote for a messenger to come after the sum needed, and I start to-night, and wish you would tell me just how to get there."

"I'll tell you what I will do," said the officer, suddenly.

"Well?"

"I will take you with me."

"No—are you going?"

"Yes, I was going up to the neighborhood to collect payment upon a small farm my father sold, and you can easily reach the village from there, and drive over to Riverview."

"I will not promise to go to the homestead with you, for I had some little trouble with Captain Evans, and do not care that he shall know when I am in his neighborhood."

"But I will take you within a league of the place."

"This is splendid, for I dreaded the trip alone; but do you go in to-night's stage?"

"I do not go by stage, but in my own stiff little pleasure sloop, which lies here in the harbor."

"So much the better, for I do love the water!"

"Do you mind being sailor for the voyage?"

"No, indeed, I would rather like it; but we will have to keep our eyes open for British enemies."

"Oh, there is no danger, as we can hug the coast, which I know well, and run into any of the coves if we are in danger."

"Good. But when do you start?"

"I was to go this afternoon; will that suit you?"

"Yes, and I will let my partner know the change in my plans."

"No, do not speak of it, for he may think it safer for you to go by stage, and I want your company."

"I'll not desert you, Elmore."

"Then we'll get off soon, and I'll meet you at the Bull's Head Inn in a couple of hours."

"Agreed!" and the two parted, Rodney Vail to make immediate arrangements for his trip, and Lieutenant Elmore to hasten to the piers.

"I want the best small craft you have," he said, to a man seated in a small office upon the end of a pier.

"Well, sir, I have some good pleasure-craft to hire and sell, for I suppose that is what you want?"

"It is, and I want a boat that can stand rough weather and be handled by two men easily."

"How do you like that little sloop off there?" and the boatman pointed to a graceful craft of some five tons burden.

"She's a beauty and looks like a goer."

"She is fast and can stand up in a blow, while, if need be, she lays to in a gale like a line-of-battle ship."

"Then she has a cabin for four and all complete."

"Her price?"

"To buy?"

"No, to hire."

"For how long?"

"Say two weeks."

"Well, you can have her for twenty-five a week."

"I will take her."

"Will you give me the name of some one to whom I can refer, for you are not known to me, though you do look the gentleman."

"I will give you a deposit, which is better, as I am a stranger here. How much do you want?"

"She cost me a clean thousand, sir."

"Here is your money, and take this and store her well with the best provisions, for say, two weeks."

"I will, sir."

"And have her ready for me at once."

With this Lieutenant Elmore turned away and walked rapidly toward the house where he had established himself in the city with his wife and father.

Simply stating that he would be out of the city for a week or so, and seizing his cloak and arms he departed for the Bull's Head Inn, and, meeting Rodney Vail there, they were soon after on board the little pleasure-sloop, flying swiftly out of the harbor on their cruise to the coast of Maine.

CHAPTER XX.

HAUNTED.

THE moon streamed brightly down upon the coast of Maine, making its rugged shore stand out in bold and picturesque relief.

"That is a forbidding coast to be off in a storm, Elmore," said Rodney Vail, as he sat by the side of his friend in the little pleasure-craft which had safely made the run from Boston.

"Yes, but to one who knows its inlets, channels and harbors, the coast is a safe refuge."

"Is that not a fort yonder?" and Rodney Vail pointed to a cliff that towered up grandly in the moonlight.

"It was an old fortification, but was long ago deserted."

"Here, I shall run in now and we will anchor in a cove round yonder point."

"From there it is but four miles to Riverview, and five to the village, but I would advise that you go to the village and stop at the tavern to-night, driving out to Riverview after breakfast."

"That would be best, I guess."

"Yes, and you can dine at the homestead, return in the afternoon to the village, and leave the vehicle at the hill upon which stands an old tower."

"Then take the road leading from the village by the tower and it will bring you to that old fortification on the cliff there and I will be there awaiting you."

"But if I should be delayed?"

"I will be there when you come; but, remember, do not speak of how you came, or that I am with you, for, as I told you, they summoned me to appear at the trial of Evans's boy and as I did not go, not wishing to get him into trouble as I could have done, I might be held for contempt, you know."

"Yes; I will not speak of it, but lead the captain to think I came by stage; but come up to the cliff with me first and start me well from there, and then I can readily find my way back even if I come by night."

Landing in the little cove, the two friends went up the ridge pathway to the cliff and Lieutenant Elmore showed Rodney Vail just where he would meet him and then walked on with him for a mile or so toward the village.

"Now, the man I wish to see lives over there, Rodney, so I will leave you here, and go and collect my money."

"We will have to be careful on our way back, Elmore, as we would enrich an Englishman who captured us, for I expect to get, as I told you, twenty thousand dollars from Captain Evans."

"Yes, it would be a nice sum for an Englishman to grasp."

"Well, luck to you, and I'll expect you by this time to-morrow night."

The two friends then parted, Rodney Vail

continuing on toward the village, and Lieutenant Elmore, standing where he had parted from him.

For some moments he stood still and then slowly retraced his way.

He had nearly reached the Haunted Fort when he stopped suddenly.

"Fool that I was! why did I bid him meet me there?"

"The spot ever was hateful to me and now it is terribly so, since, from the vessel's deck that day I saw poor Nora spring to her death from the old fort, and dash into the sea.

"Will I never shut that horrible sight forever out of my mind, I wonder?"

"It haunts me from day to day and nightly I see her in my dreams.

"Fool! fool that I was to tell him to meet me there.

"It is haunted, they say, and they tell the truth.

"And I, too, am haunted, haunted with memories that will never down at my bidding.

"If I could catch him, I would hasten on after him to tell him; but no, I will head him off before he gets there, for I dare not visit that spot.

"No, no; I dare not go there, for she would rise before me in spirit, as I saw her last in flesh.

"Ah! but I made a mistake, a fatal mistake, in not marrying Nora, for I loved her, and did not love the one to whom I am bound.

"I married her to gain some wealth, and now she is a pauper, and I have but two thousand dollars in the world, and I owe twice that for gambling-debts that must be paid.

"Had I taken Nora, whatever Captain Evans might have had against my father, he is not the man to visit upon me the sins of my parents, and I would have been rich and happy with the woman I loved.

"But, alas! the die is cast, and I made the fatal mistake, so must drift with the tide of circumstances, be they what they may," and Lieutenant Elmore, a man with a haunted heart, hastened back to his sloop, little dreaming that Nora, whom he believed dead, was so near him in flesh and blood, alive and well.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ASSASSIN.

WHEN the shadows of night began to deepen the following evening, Lieutenant Elmore wended his way slowly up the ridge pathway from the cove to keep his appointment with Rodney Vail.

He had kept his boat hidden in a little creek all day, and kept quiet, not desirous to attract the attention of any fisherman that might pass the cove in his boat.

Now, as he walked slowly along, his face was pale, and wore a set look.

At last he reached the roadway, and in the distance he saw glimmering in the moonlight, the white cottage where had dwelt Elsie and her children.

Some uncontrollable feeling drew his steps thither, and he stood at the little gate gazing upon the cottage.

It was dark and tenantless, and yet it did not

wear the air of neglect that generally hangs about a deserted house.

Some kind hand had kept the weeds out of the garden and walks, and tenderly cared for the flowers, which were rapidly feeling the biting breath of the coming winter.

From the cottage Lieutenant Elmore involuntarily went toward the Haunted Fort.

Some power which he seemed unable to resist drew him thither.

The old ruin loomed up grandly in the moonlight, and following the impulse that drew him on, he boldly entered the tunnel entrance and stood within the fortress.

The moon shone brightly down, revealing the old guns, the graves over in the corner of the plaza, the cavernous rocks in the background, and the towering moss overhead and upon either side.

Walking to the very spot where he had seen Nora Evans stand, the day she took the suicidal leap into the sea, as he was sailing away with his bride, he too stood there and the thoughts that worked upon him almost overwhelmed him.

Then he turned and was just about to spring over the rocky breastwork, when he crouched down upon his knees, transfixed with horror, while from his quivering lips came the words:

"Great God! can such things really be? It is Nora's ghost! the spirit of her I murdered, haunting the spot from where she took her fatal leap to death!"

And it was no wonder that the guilty man, whose desertion of poor Nora had caused her to wish to die, was horror-struck, and trembled in mortal agony, for, slowly crossing the fort plaza, was the form of a young girl, and the moonlight falling full upon her revealed the face of Nora Evans!

She passed on into the larger of the caverns of the rocky background and disappeared.

Then the almost fear-maddened man sprang to his feet, bounded over the parapet of rock, and rushed toward the tunnel exit.

But again he started back, for a form suddenly appeared before him.

"Ho, Elmore, I am here, and delighted to meet you," cried Rodney Vail, for he it was.

"Did you get the gold?" hoarsely demanded the officer.

"Yes, I got the money in gold and bank-notes, and have all here in this sachel, and a heavy weight it is to carry, I assure you."

"Then die! for what more fitting place than this for me to kill you.

"Die, I say, and lie here, for no one will ever seek your body in this spot."

And deep into the heart of the young man sunk the knife, held in the hand of one he had believed his friend.

A loud cry of agony and despair went from the pallid lips, as a second time the knife was buried to the hilt, and Rodney Vail sunk down upon the rock, crying out:

"Elmore, you have killed me!"

"Yes, and I did it for your gold, Rodney Vail.

"I did intend to hurl you into the sea on our run back, but this is the very spot where such a deed should be done by me, and I have done it."

"And you are my prisoner, sir."

The stern words fell like a cannon's discharge upon the ears of Lieutenant Elmore, and paralyzed with fear, he turned, while his knife dropped with a loud ring upon the rocks, the sight he beheld taking all power from his nerveless hand.

CHAPTER XXII.

CAIN-ACCURSED.

STANDING before him, when he turned at the stern words that fell upon his ear, Lieutenant Elmore beheld three persons.

One was a tall, handsome man in uniform, and he held a sword with the point toward the heart of the assassin.

The second one was a youth, whom the reader knows as Ned, the Boy Skipper, while the third, upon whom the eyes of the lieutenant were fixed with horror, was Nora, looking wondrously beautiful in the moonlight.

"Great God! am I dreaming?" gasped the murderer.

"If you will look down upon the body of the man you but now killed to get his gold, or if you attempt resistance, sir, you will discover that you are very wide awake," said Sir Lucien, sternly, for he it was.

"And, Nora, are you then not dead?"

"No; I was spared that I might live to discover what a fool I was in ever believing that I loved such as you," was the scathing reply.

"And you, sir, who are you?" haughtily demanded Elmore, gaining courage when he discovered that he did not have a ghost to deal with.

"I am, sir, an officer, and you are my prisoner," was the reply.

"Your words have an English ring to them, and—"

"It matters not, Lieutenant Elmore, who, or what I am.

"I heard your words, saw your act, which I was too late to prevent, and, as an assassin and highway robber, I make you my prisoner.

"Resist, and you die."

"One moment, I pray you," and Nora stepped toward the speaker, and then continued earnestly:

"This man won, as I believed, my love.

"Now I know that I was only fascinated by him, as a bird might be by a serpent.

"But in his veins and mine flow the same blood, and for the sake of the past, I would not see him hanged.

"Let him go, I beg of you, sir, and maybe from this night he will lead a different life.

"What he has done cannot be undone, and the world must know of his crime, and eternal disgrace come upon him.

"But I would not see him die at the yard-arm for his crime, and so I say to you now, Lieutenant Elmore, go and sin no more, and hide yourself from those who will track you down for the murder you have this night committed.

"Ned, my brother, do you not say as I do?" and she turned to Ned, who stood calmly by, a pistol in hand.

"Yes, sis, let him go; but let him hide out of the State of Maine.

"Go, Lieutenant Elmore, and do not forget

that you owe your life to the one you so cruelly deserted!"

"But, Nora—"

"Go, sir, or I will be tempted to save the hangman trouble, and hurl you over yonder cliff," sternly said the English officer.

"Lieutenant Elmore loved life, and shuddered at the thought of dying upon the gallows.

He had committed murder for gold.

He saw disgrace staring him in the face, and death if he did not fly.

But life was offered him, and the world was before him, and without a word he turned and walked quickly away.

Then Sir Lucien knelt by the body of Rodney Vail, and said sadly:

"He is dead."

"Poor man, he is the one who left Riverview only a few hours ago to return to Boston.

"He did not say that he had come here by sea; but led us to believe that he had arrived in the stage; but the words of his slayer showed the plot against him.

"Ned, a fisherman came to the mansion at sunset, and reported that a pretty little sloop was lying concealed in Hideaway Creek, and knowing that you were here with Sir Lucien, I mounted my horse to ride over and tell you."

"It was the craft that they came in, sis; but now, will you return home, and send the carriage after this poor young man, and ask father to drive, for it must not be known that he was killed here, as then some busybodies might invade the old ruin, and find Sir Lucien."

"True, brother, and—"

"Light ho!" suddenly called out the British officer, as he spied a light off at sea.

All turned their gaze in that direction, and placing his glass to his eye, Sir Lucien said:

"Now, my good friends, I will relieve you of your kind care of me and my troublesome presence, for yonder vessel is the sloop-of-war—yes, there she displays the signal agreed upon.

"I owe you, Ned, my life, and both of you have been most kind to me, and I will not forget it.

"Miss Evans, again I say we will meet again, and Ned, I trust never to meet you upon the seas while this unhappy war is raging between your country and mine.

"Now, good-by, and I will go down to the place where you hid the skiff for me, and depart."

A few more words of farewell, and the noble Englishman departed.

Soon they saw him glide away from the shore in his skiff, and head for the sloop-of-war, now lying to not far from the reefs, for the sea was not fretted by any wind.

As the sloop-of-war glided away a blaze shot out from her side, and then another, and the deep boom of two heavy guns came rolling landward.

It was the British officer's last good-by to the brother and sister standing in the ruined fort.

Then, as they were about to turn away, they beheld a small sloop shoot out from the shadow of the land and head seaward.

It was the little craft bearing Lieutenant Elmore in his flight for life.

Then Ned took up the sachel of the dead man, and, with his sister, left the fort, Nora, having come on horseback, mounting and riding rapidly homeward to tell the sad tidings to her parents of the tragedy in the old ruin, and who it was that had to wander a Cain-accursed man throughout the world.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOISTING THE BLACK FLAG.

MIDWINTER has passed and the snows are melting from the Maine hills and valleys.

The thunders of war yet resound upon land and sea, and the cruisers of England are almost daily seen along the coast.

Changes have come to some of the scenes and characters of our story, for a garrison has been placed in the Haunted Fort, and new guns replace the old ones, and command the entrance to the dangerous channels that run into the river, while a small fortress has been built on the river near Riverview Mansion, so that the inmates of that pleasant home had a lively winter of it, with gallant young officers so near at hand, and an occasional vessel-of-war lying at anchor in the river.

The home of Captain Evans always had its latch-string hanging on the outside of the door, and a hospitable welcome awaited all; but many a young officer's heart got a wound there from the eyes of Nora, who, friendly to all, seemed to love no one in particular.

Captain Evans had gone to Boston with Ned just after the death of Rodney Vail, and the youth had made his report of the scene which his sister and himself had witnessed, keeping back, however, the fact that there was an English officer as a third witness, yet stating the scene of the murder, as, Sir Lucien being gone, there was no reason for keeping that secret any longer.

The result of this report was that Lieutenant Elmore was dismissed from the service, branded as an outlaw, and a reward placed upon his head.

In the village near Riverview changes had also occurred, for the militia had given place to a few companies of regulars, so that Major Bounce found his occupation gone, and was forced to retire to a quiet and obscure life.

But the denizens of that sleepy hamlet were still troubled in mind over the affair of the ghosts waylaying the stage-coach.

The fat *aide*, with his two soldiers and Charcoal Sam, had returned to the relay station with their startling story, and nearly stampeded all that lived in that vicinity.

With dawn a party visited the place, for no one would go by night, and found the stage with the horses hitched to it, but no sign of the ghosts or the prisoner.

The closest search also failed to discover either the former or the latter, and Charcoal Sam drove the valiant guards back to the village, and resigned forthwith his situation as driver.

Through the whole winter this was a weird topic of talk, as also the other numerous rumors of how the war was progressing on sea and shore.

"Well, Ned, next week we leave to take

charge of our vessel," said Captain Evans, as he opened his mail at breakfast one morning, and read a letter from his agent.

"I am glad of that, sir, for now we will have a chance to see lively service," responded Ned joyfully, while his mother and sister looked sad at the news.

"Ah! what is this?" cried Captain Evans, as he opened a letter, and then he read aloud:

"The sensation here is the cutting out of the new schooner built by Foley for a privateer, by young Elmore, who, you remember, was once a lieutenant in the navy.

"He boarded her by night with a large crew of desperate men, threw overboard the half-dozen men in charge, and boldly sailed out to sea.

"Vessels coming in the next day reported that at sunrise the schooner ran the black flag up to her peak, and saluted it with minute-guns, so that now he is Elmore the Pirate."

"This Foley is the man who was poor Vail's partner, so, Ned, Elmore has stolen a vessel that I advanced the money to buy, and we will have to look him up and put a noose about his neck, if he is kin to us, for such kindred as he is had better be hanged," said the captain sternly.

As for Nora, she said nothing; but most deeply thankful was she that she had escaped being the wife of a man who had raised the black flag of a pirate above his decks.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST PRIZE.

At last the privateer was finished, and, with every rope in place, a crew of seventy-five men on board, the *Sea Sorceress*, as Captain Evans called his new vessel, set sail on her cruising for English foes.

Her guns were of the very best, and her crew was made up among the island fishermen, Leander being second lieutenant, while Ned was next in rank to his father, a position the captain considered him fully capable of taking, for he had proven himself competent on many occasions of doing the duties of a man.

Once at sea, and every seaman on board turned his eyes anxiously upon the graceful hull and taper rigging of the new vessel.

She was a beauty, that was certain, from keel to tuck; but would she prove herself as good as she looked?

The wind was stiff, and the sea rough; but after regarding the vessel for half an hour, one and all burst forth in a hearty cheer, for they saw that the *Sea Sorceress* was staunch, carried her sail splendidly, and flew like the very winds over the waves.

Hardly had the cheer died away when the cheery cry came from the mast-head:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" called out Captain Evans.

"Dead ahead, sir."

Soon after came the question to Ned, who had ascended to the cross-trees:

"What do you make her out, Ned?"

"A schooner, sir, and armed."

"Perhaps I can tell you just what she is in a little while," answered Ned, who was examining her closely through his glass.

In a little while he returned to the deck, and said quietly:

"Father, I know that schooner!"

"Indeed! what is she, Ned?"

"She flies the English flag."

"An Englishman, eh?"

"No, sir, an American schooner, but at present under English colors."

"Well, Ned, you have something else to tell?"

"Yes, sir, it is the vessel I would give much to take, for it is Lieutenant Elmore's schooner."

"What! the Pirate?"

"Ah, no, sir, but the one on which I was a cabin-boy, and which was captured by the British sloop-of-war that mother piloted in, hoping to capture Elmore on board."

"Ned, we must retake that vessel, and, my son, as you were accused of having been the pilot that brought the English vessel in to capture her, you shall command this schooner now, so take charge at once, for the Sea Sorceress is in your hands."

Ned's face brightened at this, for he was most anxious to recapture the schooner, knowing that it would delight his mother to know that what she had lost in seeking her revenge, had been regained by her son.

Instantly he took command, gave his orders in a clear, ringing voice, and had the schooner quickly bounding away toward the other vessel, while he had her covered with canvas.

The English schooner had also sighted the American, and finding that she was a foe worthy of her steel, she squared away to meet her, anxious to gain another fast-sailing American, craft to add to the British Navy.

The two vessels were well matched in size and guns; but the Englishman seemed to have the advantage in crew as far as numbers went, for she showed fully a hundred.

But the Americans cared little for this, and Ned ordered the first gun of defiance to be fired and the Stars and Stripes to be run up.

The English schooner replied by showing her colors and sending a broadside upon the Sea Sorceress, but as she fired while in stays, she sent her shot flying wild.

Instantly the Sea Sorceress fired a broadside, and a cheer broke from her crew as they discovered how true had been their first fire upon a foe, for the bowsprit and fore-topmast of the enemy were cut away.

Taking advantage of her success the Sea Sorceress now fired rapidly, and her iron hail was so hot that it drove the Englishmen from their work repairing damages.

"Boarders ho!" cried Ned, who had thus far given every order that was issued, his father not opening his lips and acting simply as an under officer.

Ned glanced at him to see what he thought of his call for boarders, and determination to board the enemy; but Captain Evans gave no sign that he either approved or disapproved the act.

"Do you think it wise, sir, to board her?" asked Ned, feeling some doubt upon the subject as he saw his enemy had the largest crew.

"You are in command, my son; use your own discretion," was the non-committal reply.

Thus left to his own judgment wholly, Ned at once gave orders for a broadside to be deliv-

ered at close quarters, the guns to be loaded with grape.

With the rebound of the guns he saw the wisdom of this act, for the grape cut down numbers of the English crew, and before they could recover from its effects the two schooners were alongside.

The sea was rough, but both were well handled, and springing on board with his boarders, two-thirds of his crew being at his back, the Boy Skipper showed his nerve and forethought by at once ordering the Sea Sorceress to haul off from the enemy, as the pounding of the two together might injure their hulls seriously.

Captain Evans had purposely remained on the schooner, and sung out an affirmative reply at Ned's order as the two vessels swung apart.

In the mean time the fiercest fight was raging upon the deck of the Englishman, and Ned, followed by his irresistible boarders, was driving all before him.

Once on the deck of his foe, Ned determined that nothing should prevent the capture of the Englishman.

This the enemy seemed to realize, for they began to cry for quarter, and stepping forward, the commander of the schooner called out:

"I am forced to haul down my colors."

"To whom do I surrender my sword?"

"To me, sir, if you please," modestly returned Ned.

"To you, a boy?" said the officer, with wonderment in look and manner.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you command that schooner?"

"At present, yes, sir."

"I see that you wear an officer's uniform; but you—"

"Pardon me, sir, but this delay is not necessary, and the wounded are suffering for care," said Ned, haughtily.

"True, I was wrong; here is my sword, young sir, and I must certainly say I surrender it to a gallant youth indeed."

"Thank you, sir, and permit me to return your sword to you," and Ned handed back the weapon with a kindly smile, for his heart was touched for his brave enemy.

In a short while the dead had been buried and the wounded cared for, and Ned was placed on board the prize to run her into port, which he did, surrendering her to the admiral of the fleet, who at once said to him:

"My word for it, my Boy Lieutenant, that you will win your way to a captain's rank before this war ends."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWO FLAGS.

AGAIN did the Sea Sorceress spread her sails and fly seaward, having already gained for herself a name, for her first prize was not only an English cruiser a little her superior in the number of her crew, but an American vessel that had been recaptured from the British.

The battle, in which numbers had fallen upon both sides, and in which the Sea Sorceress had sought the conflict, proved that the privateer had not started out only as a seeker of defense-

less prizes and gain, but was willing to strike a blow for her country when need be.

As vessels coming in from Southern waters had lately reported ravages committed by a pirate schooner answering the description of the vessel sent out by Elmore, Captain Evans determined to look him up and capture him, if in his power, and said to Ned:

"If we capture Elmore, my son, we can do the country a service by hanging a pirate, avenge ourselves for every wrong he has done us, and at the same time I can get back the twenty thousand it cost me to build and equip the schooner which he stole."

"I hope we can capture her, for father, I fear all the time, while he is afloat as a pirate, that he will go and pay them we love at River-view a visit."

Captain Evans turned very pale at this, and said with emotion:

"I never thought of this wickedness on his part, Ned, and now that you suggest it, and it is very possible for him to carry out such a thing, I am determined to hunt him down."

Then the Sea Sorceress was put away upon her southward course, and the next day a sail was sighted.

The schooner was put away for a nearer look at the stranger, and soon the lookout at the mast-head reported her to be:

"A large schooner with masts raking far aft, a narrow, long hull, and heavily armed."

"What colors, Ned?" called out the captain.

"She does not show any."

"Is she larger than we are?"

"About our tonnage, sir, and her decks seem crowded."

"Let me hear from you if you make any new discoveries."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Ned, and he kept his eye steadily upon the stranger.

As the two vessels drew nearer together, Ned placed his glass once more to his eye, and after a long look called out:

"Ho! the deck!"

"Ay, ay," answered the captain.

"I notice that her sails are patched in many places, as though to cover up ball-holes, and her masts and spars have niches in them as from the same cause."

"She has seen hot work then, and her rig looks American."

"I think she is an American, sir, but I cannot make her out yet."

Nearer and nearer the two vessels drew to each other, and then Ned again hailed the deck.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the captain.

"An officer with a glass has just ascended to the mast-head, sir."

"Keep your eye on him while he takes a look at us, Ned."

"I will, sir," and almost immediately the Boy Lieutenant continued:

"He is giving some order to an officer on the deck."

"There! the schooner goes about and is crowding on sail."

"She is running from us, sir."

"Ay, ay, Ned, and no brave Englishman would do that, nor would an American pri-

vateer run off before she knew what her foe was."

"It looks suspicious, sir," remarked Leander.

"Of what?" asked Ned, joining them.

"It looks as though she was in search of easy prizes, and wanted no hard knocks," continued Leander.

"You are right. She is in my mind a pirate, and I trust the one we wish to find."

"Square away in chase, Ned, and run up your colors."

The Sea Sorceress was at once put away in chase of the strange schooner, which had a league start, and, as she crowded on sail, the stranger was seen to do likewise.

"Now up with the colors, Leander," called out Ned, and the Stars and Stripes went fluttering to the peak.

Almost instantly, and while every eye was watching, there came a puff of smoke from the stranger's port bow, and a gun was fired in defiance, while over her deck fluttered the black flag of the lawless sea rover.

"Hal! he is not ashamed of his hideous ensign, though he does run off."

"Crowd on all sail, Mr. Leander, and we will see if we cannot replace his sable flag with the Stars and Stripes."

Under the tremendous pressure of canvas upon her masts, the Sea Sorceress fairly flew over the waves, and began to gain, though very slowly, upon the pirate.

"He has a fleet craft at any rate, and it will be a long chase; but I do not like the looks of the sky, and fear we are going to have a stormy night," said the captain, glancing anxiously about him.

"And if it comes on to storm, he may dodge us in the darkness," responded Ned.

"Yes, that is just what I fear."

For two hours, until the sun went down, the two beautiful vessels went skimming over the sea, both under all the canvas that they would bear.

But in that time the Sea Sorceress had not gained more than a quarter of a mile, so that it did indeed threaten to be a long chase.

With the going down of the sun the wind increased to half a gale, and an hour after dark it was blowing a gale, while the skies were black with clouds, and the darkness became almost tangible.

The pirate had shown no lights at dark, and the Sea Sorceress had followed her example, so that there was not a twinkle to be seen upon either vessel as they sped along over the waters.

Then, in spite of every eye being on the lookout, the pirate was lost sight of, and the Sea Sorceress was at a loss which course to pursue.

"He is likely to lay to and ride out the storm until morning, and we might as well do the same," said the captain.

"May I make a suggestion, father?"

"Certainly, Ned."

"I eyed that vessel pretty closely, as long as there was a ray of light."

"So I noticed."

"And I discovered that she was about the size, build and rig of the vessel that Elmore cut out, and which you had that pretty model of."

"Well, Ned?"

"And I believe it is the same craft."

"Such was my opinion, Ned, when I first saw her; but it seems we have lost her now."

"We have lost sight of her; but did you notice the course she was heading when we caught sight of her?"

"No."

"She was on a course that was northward, and she may have been bound to the Maine Coast."

"By Heaven! Ned, you may be right."

"I fear that I am, sir, and I think it would be a good idea to crack on what sail we can and head for home as quickly as possible."

"I will do so, Ned, so give the necessary orders, my boy, and the Sorceress shall lose no time in getting there, I assure you."

Five minutes after the fleet schooner was bound upon her trip northward.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TREACHEROUS SIGNALS.

ONE blustering afternoon, some ten days after the Sea Sorceress was headed for Riverview Mansion, a party of half a dozen persons stood in what had been the Haunted Fort, gazing seaward and watching the maneuvers of a pretty schooner that was in the offing.

The party consisted of several officers of the fort and as many ladies, among the latter being Nora Evans and her mother, who had gone to the fort to spend the day with the wife of the commandant.

"It is certainly a beautiful vessel," said Captain Routh, the commander of the fortress.

"Yes, and her rig is American, so if she flies English colors, she has been captured from us," rejoined Nora.

"You seem to be a perfect sailor, Miss Evans, to know the rig of a vessel as you do," remarked a young lieutenant, who was desperately in love with the fair maid of Riverview.

"Living on the sea as I have so long, and seeing so many vessels of different nationalities, I have come to know their rig and build, as one recognizes a German, an Englishman and an American by his face," modestly responded Nora.

"Well, she stands in as though she wished to run in," remarked Captain Routh.

"You will soon know, sir, for if she does, you will find her fire a signal for a pilot."

"And, Miss Nora, it will be in vain, for there is not one on the coast that I know of."

"And none who would dare attempt to run a vessel in with the sea as rough as it is, and half a gale blowing," said Mrs. Evans.

"Oh, mother! what if it should be father's schooner?" suddenly cried Nora.

"I hope that it is; but see, she lays to and fires a gun for a pilot."

"It is not the Sorceress, Nora, for Ned is the best pilot that ever ran a vessel through yonder channel," and Mrs. Evans spoke with evident pride in her gallant boy.

"She wants a pilot, that is certain, and see, she runs up our flag," remarked Captain Routh.

"She is certainly an American, for an Englishman would not place himself in jeopardy by

running in under the guns of the fort," Mrs. Evans said.

"Have you a signal-book, Captain Routh?" cried Nora.

The captain had such a book, and the lieutenant darted after it and soon placed it in Nora's hands.

"Oh, mother! it is the Sea Sorceress!" cried Nora.

"Then why does not Ned bring her in?"

"Great God! can harm have befallen my boy?" said Mrs. Evans, turning deathly pale.

"Have you signal flags, captain?" asked Nora, calmly, though she too became pale.

The flags were soon brought, and hauling down the flag, and stepping to the halyards, Nora ran up the signals, asking:

"Why do you wish a pilot?"

"To run in," came the answer.

"Where is Ned?" asked Nora, with her signals.

Breathlessly all gazed upon the maiden to await her reading of the signal response.

It soon came:

"We captured a prize and he took it into Portland."

"Thank God," cried Mrs. Evans, fervently, and more than one present breathed a fervent:

"Amen!"

"Can you send us a pilot?" again came the signal from the schooner.

"Mother, I will go myself, for night will soon be here, and father must not remain in sight of us when I am able to bring the schooner in."

But a cry arose from all at this, all but Mrs. Evans, who said calmly:

"You are right, Nora."

"But Mrs. Evans, will you permit Nora to do such a thing?" asked Mrs. Routh anxiously.

"Oh yes, for she knows the channel well, and once brought a schooner in at night, and in a gale."

"Have you any surf-skiff in the cove, captain?"

"Yes, madam, there is one there, and if Miss Nora is determined to go, I will accompany her," said the captain.

"No, I must risk the danger alone."

"Let me signal that I will come," and Nora sent the words:

"FATHER:—I will come out and pilot you in."

"NORA."

Instantly came back the signal:

"Bless you, my child!"

Then Nora, throwing about her a wrap left the fort and descended to the cove, accompanied by Captain Routh.

There she found the surf-skiff, and again Captain Routh urged to go.

But Nora was firm, and springing into the little craft, she seized the oars and sent it spinning out of the cove.

Going back to the fort the captain joined the others, and all of the party anxiously watched the little skiff as it headed out from the land.

Interested in the act of the daring girl, the soldiers of the fort crowded upon the parapets and gazed after the receding boat.

Out through the dangerous channels she held her way, and never resting upon her oars, they

saw her reach the schooner, and run under her lee side.

A gangway was then lowered for her, and she was soon on board.

Then the schooner was at once gotten under way again, and, instead of standing in toward the channel, she turned her sharp prow about and headed seaward, while up to her peak suddenly went *the black flag of the pirate*.

A cry of horror broke from every lip, and Mrs. Evans sunk down in a swoon, murmuring:

"God have mercy upon my poor child, for she is in the power of Elmore, the Pirate."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BOY LIEUTENANT'S REVENGE.

IN the excitement attending the flight of the schooner, with the black flag flying at her peak, and Nora Evans upon her deck, it was some moments before any one noticed a second vessel coming at a tremendous pace along the coast.

That an island hid the one vessel from the other was evident to those who watched them from the fort.

The stranger was a schooner of graceful build and rakish look.

She was also armed and carried at her peak the Stars and Stripes.

Swiftly she came along, and although the wind increased in severity and the waves ran higher, she held straight on toward the channel into the haven under the lee of the island, notwithstanding that it was growing dark.

Straight for the channel between the Graveyard Reefs she headed, and, when those on the fort listened, expecting to hear the crash and shrieks of her drowning crew, they saw her lights pass safely through the dangerous channel and head for the Island Pass.

Through this, too, she glided, and then put her helm down and steered for the river haven.

"It is my husband's vessel, and my boy ran her in," said Mrs. Evans, when, recovering from her swoon, she heard about the strange schooner.

Then she got into her carriage and, accompanied by Captain and Mrs. Routh, was driven rapidly homeward.

As the carriage drew up at the door, Ned sprang to meet her.

But she could not utter a word, and the Boy Lieutenant said:

"Well, mother, we have come to see you; but I am sorry that father is slightly wounded.

"We had a running-fight with a pirate the other day, and for the second time he escaped us at night and in a storm, while father got wounded in the leg, but it is not very severe, he says."

Mrs. Evans bounded into the house to the side of her wounded husband, while Captain Routh quickly told Ned of the capture of his sister.

Without waiting to hear more the boy darted away toward the river.

Springing into a boat he rowed on board, and startled the crew, who were expecting a quiet night of it, by ordering the anchor up and all sail set.

All saw that the Boy Lieutenant was terribly earnest, and in a few minutes after his arrival

on board, the Sea Sorceress was under way and heading out of the river.

Hails were heard from the shore, and Ned recognized his mother's voice; but he heeded not, and was soon dashing out to sea through the storm and the perils of the channel.

Once clear of the land, search was made by every eye on board, and from the mast-head came the cry:

"Light ho!"

"Whereaway, Leander?" called out Ned, for it was the second lieutenant who had gone up to the mast-head.

"Off-shore, and dead ahead."

"Ay, ay, I'll head for it."

The light soon was seen from the deck, and it was evident that the vessel that bore it, was approaching in the direction of the Sea Sorceress.

Seeing this, Ned ordered every light on his vessel put out, and away she sped in the darkness.

After some time had passed, Leander came rapidly down from aloft, and said in a hurried tone:

"I believe without doubt that it is the pirate!"

"I hope so," said Ned

Then the men were sent quietly to quarters, and the Sea Sorceress was brought up into the wind and allowed to lay to.

That she had not been seen from the pirate's deck was evident, for the coming schooner held on her course, running along about a league off the land.

Nearer and nearer she came, until but a quarter of a mile divided them, and then Ned ordered the Sea Sorceress gotten under way once more.

The creaking of her blocks and fluttering of her sails was the first admonition those on the stranger had of her near vicinity.

Instantly loud voices were heard, and a torrent of profanity was poured forth upon the head of the lookout.

"That sounds piratical," said Leander.

"It is Elmore's vessel, I know," answered Ned.

Following the excitement on the pirate came the drum calling the crew to quarters, and then Ned called out:

"Lads, I do not intend to fire upon him, for my sister is on board that craft, and the sail on the schooner now is all she will need, so every man go below until I call you to carry yonder pirate by boarding."

The men demurred at this, but Ned was firm, urging that they should not risk the fire of their foe and not return it, and the crew were sent below decks forward and aft, armed to the teeth, and to there await a call upon deck.

But Leander was firm and would not go, and stepped to the wheel by the side of Ned.

Just at that moment came a broadside from the pirate, and some of the shot sent showers of splinters over the deck while others cut through the sails.

But the Sea Sorceress was held firmly on her way in hot chase of the pirate, who was now in full flight.

But it was evident that the Sorceress was the

better sea boat in rough weather, for she carried more canvas and forged ahead more rapidly through the waves.

The pirate felt that he dared not carry more sail, as he feared he would run his vessel under, and gave orders to his crew to cripple their pursuer or they would be taken.

A hot fire was therefore turned upon the Sea Sorceress, and she did not by any means escape unscathed, for her fore-topmast was cut away and her bulwarks were badly riddled.

But no vital part was struck, and not one of her crew was hurt.

The gale in the mean time had swept entirely around, and the wind decreased in force from a gale to a stiff breeze, while a pouring rain beat down the waves, and caused Leander to remark:

"If this keeps up, we'll have calm weather to board in."

"I am glad of it, for it would have been terribly risky boarding an hour ago; but I would have done so before he should have escaped me," was Ned's firm rejoinder.

The two vessels had now run back to a point almost directly opposite to the fort, and not a length now divided them.

Still firing from his stern guns, the pirate held on, while hot upon her heels came the Sorceress.

Nearer and nearer she crept, until her prow was even with the stern of the other schooner, and a loud voice shouted:

"Boarders to repel boarders!"

"It is Elmore's voice," said Ned, and then he cried in clarion tones:

"Boarders, ahoy! ho, boarders, I want you!"

Just then a broadside from the pirate went tearing over the decks of the Sorceress; but, fired an instant too soon, not a man was hurt, while up from the cabin and steerage poured the gallant crew.

Hard down then went the helm of the Sorceress, and with a hard thump she was laid alongside of the outlaw craft, and grapnels were thrown to make them fast.

Then over upon the deck of his foe leaped Ned, his crew at his back, and the mad rush of the privateersmen beat the pirates down before them.

To stem the mad current of humanity was impossible, and in ten minutes the deck was won by the Boy Lieutenant and Elmore, the Buccaneer, was in irons.

Dashing into the cabin, Ned found his sister white as a corpse, and throwing herself into his arms, she cried:

"Oh, brother! he intended to run into the river to-night, burn the mansion, kill mother, and then force me to become his wife."

"I was just in time, then, sis; but he'll trouble us no more after this night," and Ned left the cabin.

"Leander, get a noose ready, and burn a blue light, for I intend to show Captain Routh and his soldiers that the days of Elmore, the Buccaneer, have ended."

The order was obeyed, and Elmore faced his victor with the noose about his neck.

"Well, boys, you have triumphed," he said.

"I will have triumphed when I see you dangling in yonder rigging."

"Burn that blue light, Leander, and lads, hoist that pirate up!"

The doomed man uttered no cry, nor prayer, and was the next instant drawn into mid-air, while, as the blue light made the two vessels stand out as light as day, the soldiers broke forth in one prolonged cheer that was heard by all on the Sorceress.

Then darkness followed and the two beautiful vessels were headed inshore, Leander at the helm of the pirate, and piloting her in by following close in the wake of the Sea Sorceress, whose wheel was of course under the master hand of the Boy Lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

A FEW words more, kind reader, and the romance of Sailor Boy Ned's early life is ended.

His capture of the pirate Elmore, added renewed fame to his name, and he became the idol of the dwellers about Riverview, where once he had been hated as the son of Elsie the Witch.

The Sea Sorceress was found to be pretty well shattered by the hot fire of the pirate, so she was laid up for repairs, as was also the buccaneer craft, which was sent to Boston with the prisoners, and to undergo an overhauling there.

By the time that the two vessels were ready for sea, Captain Evans's wound was healed, and he at once placed Ned in command of the captured pirate, getting privateer papers for him, and the two vessels sailed together as consorts, the one named the Sea Sorceress, the other the Sea Wizard, and their daring exploits through the war caused many superstitious people to believe that their commanders were indeed possessed of powers beyond the human.

When at last the long war ended, and Ned and his father returned to Riverview, they were accompanied by a distinguished gentleman who had joined them in Boston, running his vessel into port as soon as peace was declared.

This person was Captain Sir Lucien Lonsdale, who had won a distinguished name during the war, and was respected and admired as a gallant foe.

But, with the war's close, he came to Riverview to tell Nora that he loved her with all his heart, and ask her to become his bride.

Nora confessed her love in return for the noble English officer, but said that she wished ever to remain an American, and rather than lose the idol of his heart, Sir Lucien consented to make her home his home, and thus the twain became one.

As for Ned, being a natural born sailor, he could not leave the service he loved so well, and accepted a lieutenant's commission in the navy, where he rose to a high rank, and died at a ripe old age, respected by all, while the boys of generations after, read with pleasure his gallant career as Ned, the Sailor Boy.

THE END.

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